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THE

CALVINISTIC AND SOCINIAN

SYSTEMS

EXAMINED AND COMPARED,

AS TO THEIR MORAL TENDENCY:

In a SERIES of LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO THE

FRIENDS OF VITAL AND PRACTICAL RELIGION.

A NEW AND CORRECT EDITION.

To which is added,

A POSTSCRIPT,

Establishing the Principle of the Work against the exceptions of Dr. Toulmin, Mr. Belsham, &c.

By ANDREW FULLER.

GRACE BE WITH ALL THEM THAT LOVE OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IN SINCERITY. PAUL.

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PREFACE.

THE following Letters are addreſſed to *the friends of vital and practical religion*, becauſe the author is perſuaded that the very eſſence of true piety is concerned in this controverſy; and that *godly men* are the only proper judges of divine truth, being the only humble, upright, and earneſt enquirers after it. So far from thinking with Dr. Prieſtley, that "an "unbiaſſed temper of mind is attained in conſequence of becoming more indifferent to "religion in general, and to all the modes and "doctrines of it;" he is ſatisfied that perſons of that deſcription have a moſt powerful bias againſt the truth. Though it were admitted that falſe principles, accompanied with a bigoted attachment to them, are worſe than none; yet he cannot admit that irreligious men *are* deſtitute of principles. He has no notion of human minds being unoccupied, or indifferent: he that is not a friend to religion in any mode, is an enemy to it in all modes; he is a libertine; he *doth evil*, and therefore *hateth the light*. And ſhall we compliment ſuch a character by acknowledging him to be in "a favourable

" ſituation for diſtinguiſhing between truth and " falſehood?* God forbid! It is *he that doeth his will, that ſhall know of his doctrine.* The humble, the candid, the upright enquirers after truth, are the perſons who are likely to find it; and to them the author takes the liberty to appeal.

The principal occaſion of theſe Letters, was, the late union among proteſtant diſſenters, in reference to civil affairs, having been the ſource of various miſconceptions; and as the writer apprehends, improved as a mean of diſſeminating ſocinian principles.

In the late application to parliament for the repeal of the *Corporation and Teſt Acts*, the diſſenters have united without any reſpect to their doctrinal principles. They conſidered themſelves as applying merely for a *civil* right; and that in ſuch an application, difference in theological ſentiments had no more concern, than it has in the union of a nation under one civil head or form of government.

This union, however, has become an occaſion of many reflections. Serious men of the eſtabliſhed church have expreſſed their ſurpriſe that ſome diſſenters could unite with others ſo oppoſite in their religious principles; and

* *Diſcourſes on various Subjects*, p. 95.

had the union been of a *religious* nature, it muſt indeed have been ſurpriſing. Others have ſuppoſed that the main body of diſſenters had either imbibed the ſocinian ſyſtem, or were haſtily approaching towards it. Whether the ſuggeſtion of Dr. Horſley, that "the genuine "calviniſts among our modern diſſenters are "very few," has contributed to this opinion, or whatever be its origin, it is far from being juſt. Every one who *knows* the diſſenters, knows that the body of them are what is commonly called orthodox. Dr. Prieſtley, who is well known to be ſufficiently ſanguine in eſtimating the numbers of his party—ſo ſanguine that, when ſpeaking of the *common people* of this country, he reckons "nine out of ten of "them would prefer a unitarian to a trinita-"rian liturgy;"* yet acknowledges, in regard to the diſſenters, that unitarians are by far the minority. In Birmingham, where the proportion of their number to the reſt of the diſſenters is greater than in any other town in the kingdom, it appears from Dr. Prieſtley's account of the matter, that thoſe called orthodox are nearly three to one; and throughout England and Wales they have been ſuppoſed

* *Def. of Unit. for* 1786. p. 61

to be "as two, if not as three to one, to "the ſocinians and arians inclusive."*

If Dr. Horſley found it neceſſary in ſupport of his cauſe, to overturn Dr. Prieſtley's aſſertion, that "great bodies of men do not "change their opinions in a ſmall ſpace of "time;" ſome think he might have found an example more to his purpoſe, than that of the body of diſſenters having deſerted their former principles, in the well-known change of the major part of the church of England; who, about the time of Abp. Laud, went off from calviniſm to arminianiſm. Had this example been adduced, his antagoniſt might have found ſome difficulty in maintaining his ground againſt him; as it is an undoubted fact, and a fact which he himſelf acknowledges, with ſeveral others of the kind, in the *Third* of his *Familiar Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham.*

The ſuppoſition, however, of the diſſenters being generally gone, or going off to ſocinianiſm, though far from juſt, has not been without its apparent grounds. The *confidence* which ſocinians have aſſumed in papers and pamphlets, which have been circulated about

* See Dr. Prieſtley's *Familiar Letters to the inhabitants of Birmingham.* Lett. III. XI.

Alſo Mr. Parry's *Reflections on the reſolutions of the Warwick Meeting.*

the country, has afforded room for ſuch a ſuppoſition. It has not been very uncommon for them to ſpeak of themſelves as THE DISSENTERS, THE MODERN DISSENTERS, &c. It was ſaid in a paper that was publiſhed more than once, "The ancient, like *the modern diſſenters*, wor-"*ſhipped one God*—they knew nothing of the "Nicene or Athanaſian creeds."—The celebrated authoreſs of *The Addreſs to the Oppoſers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Teſt Acts*, is not clear in this matter. That otherwiſe admirable performance is tinged with the pride of party conſequence. "We thank you gen-"tlemen (ſhe ſays) for the compliment paid "the DISSENTERS, when you ſuppoſe that the "moment they are eligible to places of power "and profit, all ſuch places will at once be "filled with them.—*We* had not the preſumption to imagine that, inconſiderable as we "are in numbers, compared to the eſtabliſhed "church, inferior too in fortune and influence, "labouring as we do under the frowns of the "court, and THE ANATHEMA OF THE ORTHO-"DOX, we ſhould make our way ſo readily "into the receſſes of royal favour."—Even the *Monthly Reviewers*, though they have borne teſtimony againſt mingling doctrinal diſputes with thoſe of the repeal of the Teſt laws;* yet

* *M. R. enlarged.* Vol. I. p. 233.

have ſometimes ſpoken of diſſenters and ſocinians, as if they were terms of the ſame meaning and extent. "It appears to us as abſurd "(they ſay) to charge the religious principles "of THE DISSENTERS with republicaniſm, as "it would be to advance the ſame accuſation "againſt the Newtonian philoſophy. The doc-"trine of gravitation, may as well be deemed "dangerous to the ſtate, as SOCINIANISM."*

Is it unnatural from ſuch repreſentations as theſe, for thoſe who know but little of us, to conſider the ſocinians as conſtituting the main body of the diſſenters; and the calviniſts as only a few ſtragglers, who follow theſe leading men at a diſtance in all their meaſures, but whoſe numbers and conſequence are ſo ſmall, that even the mention of their names among proteſtant diſſenters may very well be omitted?

This, however, as it only affects our reputation, or at moſt can only impede the repeal of the Teſt-laws, by ſtrengthening a prejudice, too ſtrong already, againſt the whole body of diſſenters, might be overlooked. But this is not all: it is pretty evident that the union among us in civil matters has been improved for the purpoſe of diſſeminating religious principles. At one of the moſt public meetings for the repeal

* *M. R. enlarged*, for June 1790, p. 217.

of the *Corporation and Teſt-Acts*, as the author was credibly informed, ſocinian peculiarities were advanced, which paſſed unnoticed, becauſe, thoſe of contrary principles did not chooſe to interrupt the harmony of the meeting, by turning the attention of gentlemen from the immediate object for which they were aſſembled. What end could Dr. Prieſtley have in introducing ſo much about the Teſt-Act in his controverſy with Mr. Burn, on the perſon of Chriſt; except it were to gild the pill, and make it go down the eaſier with calviniſtic diſſenters?

The writer of theſe Letters does not blame the diſſenters of his own perſuaſion for uniting with the ſocinians. In civil matters, he thinks it lawful to unite with *men*, be their religious principles what they may; but he and many others would be very ſorry, if a union of this kind ſhould prove an occaſion of abating our zeal for thoſe religious principles which we conſider as being of the very eſſence of the goſpel.

The reaſon why the term *ſocinians* is preferred in the following Letters to that of *unitarians*, is not for the mean purpoſe of reproach; but becauſe the latter name is not a fair one. The term, as conſtantly explained by themſelves, ſignifies thoſe profeſſors of chriſtianity who worſhip *one God:* but this is not that

wherein they can be *allowed* to be diſtinguiſhed from others. For what profeſſors of chriſtianity are there, who profeſs to worſhip a plurality of Gods? Trinitarians profeſs alſo to be unitarians: they, as well as their opponents, believe there is but *one God.* To give ſocinians this name therefore *excluſively,* would be granting them the very point which they ſeem ſo deſirous to take for granted, that is to ſay, the point in debate.

Names, it may be ſaid, ſignify little; and this ſignifies no more on one ſide, than the term orthodox does on the other. The writer owns, when he firſt conceived the deſign of publiſhing theſe Letters, he thought ſo: and intended all along to uſe the term unitarians. What made him alter his mind was, his obſerving that the principal writers in that ſcheme have frequently availed themſelves of the above name, and appear to wiſh to have it thought by their readers that the point in diſpute between them and the trinitarians, is, Whether there be *three* Gods, or only *one?*

If he had thought the uſe of the term *unitarians* conſiſtent with juſtice to his own argument, he would have preferred it to that of ſocinians; and would alſo have been glad of a term to expreſs the ſyſtem which he has defended, inſtead of calling it after the name of Calvin; as he

is aware, that calling ourſelves after the names of men (though it be merely to avoid circumlocution) is liable to be underſtood as giving them an authority which is inconſiſtent with a conformity to our Lord's command, *Call no man maſter upon earth; for one is your maſter even Chriſt.*

He may add, that the ſubſtance of the following Letters was written before the riots at Birmingham. His regard to juſtice and humanity made him feel much on that occaſion for Dr. Prieſtley, and others who ſuffered with him; but his regard to what he eſteems important truth made him feel more. The injury which a doctrine receives from thoſe who would ſupport it by the unhallowed hands of plunder and perſecution, is far greater, in the eſteem of many, than it can receive from the efforts of its avowed adverſaries. For his own part, he has generally ſuppoſed that both the contrivers and executors of that iniquitous buſineſs, call themſelves what they will, were men of *no principle.* If, however, thoſe of the high-church party, who, inſtead of diſavowing the ſpirit and conduct of the miſguided populace, have manifeſtly exulted in it, muſt be reckoned among the trinitarians; he has only to ſay, they are ſuch trinitarians as he utterly diſapproves, and concerning whom he cannot ſo well expreſs his ſentiments and feelings as in the words of the patriarch: *Inſtruments of cruelty are in their*

habitations. O my ſoul, come not thou into their ſecret; unto their aſſembly mine honour be not thou united: for in their anger they ſlew a man, and in their ſelf-will they digged down a wall. Curſed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel!

Deteſtable, however, as were the riots at Birmingham, no one can plead that they render the religious principles of Dr. Prieſtley leſs erroneous, or leſs pernicious; or an oppoſition to them, upon the fair ground of argument, leſs neceſſary. On the contrary, the mere circumſtance of his being a perſecuted man will have its influence on ſome people, and incline them not only to feel for the man, the gentleman, and the philoſopher, all which is right; but to think favourably of his religious opinions. On this conſideration, if the following Letters would, previous to that event, have been in any degree proper and ſeaſonable, they are not by any thing that hath ſince occurred, become improper or unſeaſonable.

Since the firſt edition, the author has attempted in ſome places to ſtrengthen his argument, and to remove ſuch objections as have hitherto occurred. The principal *additions* will be found in Letters IV. and XV. The note towards the latter end of the former, was occaſioned by a report that Dr. Prieſtley complained

of being *miſrepreſented* by the quotation in the firſt page of the preface. This note contains a vindication, not only of the fairneſs of the quotation from Dr. Prieſtley, but of another to the ſame purpoſe from Mr. Belſham, and an anſwer to what is advanced on its behalf in the *Monthly Review.*

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THE

CALVINISTIC and SOCINIAN

SYSTEMS COMPARED.

LETTER I.

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL REMARKS.

Christian Brethren,

MUCH has been written of late years on the Socinian controverſy; ſo much, that the attention of the Chriſtian world has, to a conſiderable degree, being drawn towards it. There is no reaſon, however, for conſidering this circumſtance as a matter of wonder, or of regret. Not of *wonder:* for ſuppoſing the deity and atonement of Chriſt to be divine truths, they are of ſuch importance in the chriſtian ſcheme as to induce the adverſaries of the goſpel to bend their main force againſt them, as againſt *the rock on which Chriſt hath built his church.* Not of *regret:* for whatever partial evils may ariſe from a full diſcuſſion of a ſubject, the intereſts of truth will,

doubtleſs, in the end prevail; and the prevalence of truth is a good that will outweigh all the ills that may have attended its diſcovery. Controverſy engages a number of perſons of different talents and turns of mind; and by this means the ſubject is likely to be conſidered in every view in which it is capable of being exhibited to advantage.

The point of light in which the ſubject will be conſidered in theſe letters, namely, *as influencing the heart and life*, has been frequently glanced at on both ſides. I do not recollect, however, to have ſeen this view of it profeſſedly and ſeparately handled.

In the great controverſy in the time of Elijah, recourſe was had to an expedient by which the queſtion was decided. Each party built an altar, cut in pieces a bullock, and laid the victim upon the wood, but put no fire under; and the God that ſhould anſwer by fire, was to be acknowledged as the TRUE GOD. We cannot bring our controverſies to ſuch a criterion as this: we may bring them to one, however, which, though not ſo ſuddenly, is not much leſs infallibly evident. The tempers and lives of men are books for common people to read; and they will read them, even though they ſhould read nothing elſe. They are indeed warranted by the ſcriptures themſelves to judge of the nature of doctrines, by their holy

or unholy tendency. The true goſpel is to be known by its being a *doctrine according to godlineſs; teaching* thoſe who embrace it *to deny ungodlineſs, and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in the preſent world.* Thoſe, on the other hand, *who believe not the truth*, are ſaid to *have pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs. Profane and vain babblings*, as the miniſtrations of falſe teachers are called, *will increaſe unto more ungodlineſs;* and their word *will eat as doth a canker.** To this may be added, that the parties themſelves, engaged in this controverſy, have virtually acknowleged the juſtice and importance of the above criterion; in that both ſides have incidentally endeavoured to avail themſelves of it. A criterion, then, by which the common people will judge, by which the ſcripture authoriſes them to judge, and by which both ſides in effect agree to be judged, cannot but be worthy of particular attention.

I feel, for my own part, ſatisfied not only of the truth and importance of the doctrines in queſtion, but alſo of their holy tendency. I am aware, however, that others think differently, and that a conſiderable part of what I have to advance muſt be on the defenſive.

* 1 Tim. vi. 3. Tit. ii. 12. 2 Theſs. ii. 2. 1 Tim. ii. 16, 17.

"Admitting the truth," says Dr. Priestley, "of a trinity of persons in the godhead; original sin, arbitrary predestination, atonement by the death of Christ, and the plenary inspiration of the scriptures, their *value*, estimated by their influence on the morals of men, cannot be supposed, even by the admirers of them, to be of any moment, compared to the doctrine of the resurrection of the human race to a life of retribution: and in the opinion of those who reject them, they have a very unfavourable tendency, giving wrong impressions concerning the character and moral government of God, and such as might tend, if they have any effect, to relax the obligations of virtue."*

In many instances Dr. Priestley deserves applause for his frankness and fairness as a disputant: in this passage, however, as well as in some others, the admirers of the doctrines he mentions are unfairly represented. They who embrace the other doctrines, are supposed to hold that of *arbitrary* predestination; but this supposition is not true. The term *arbitrary* conveys the idea of caprice; and in this connexion denotes, that, in predestination, according to the Calvinistic notion of it, God resolves upon the

* *Lett. to Phil. Jun.* Pt. II. p. 23, 25.

fates of men, and appoints them to this or that, without any *reaſon* for ſo doing. But there is no injuſtice in this repreſentation. There is no ... ree in the divine mind that we conſider as void of reaſon. Predeſtination to death is on account of ſin; and as to predeſtination to life, though it be not on account of any works of righteouſneſs which we have done, yet it does not follow that God has no reaſon whatever for what he does. The ſovereignty of God is a *wiſe*, and not a capricious ſovereignty. If he hide the glory of the goſpel from the wiſe and prudent, and reveal it unto babes, it is becauſe *it ſeemeth good in his ſight.* But if it ſeem *good* in the ſight of God, it muſt, all things conſidered, be good: for the judgment of God is according to truth.

It is aſſerted alſo that the admirers of the forementioned doctrines cannot, and do not, conſider them as of equal importance with that of the reſurrection of the human race to a life of retribution. But this, I am ſatisfied, is not the caſe: for whatever Dr. Prieſtley may think, *they* conſider them, or at leaſt ſome of them, as eſſential to true holineſs; and of ſuch conſequence, even to the doctrine of the reſurrection of the human race to a life of retribution, that, without them, ſuch a reſurrection would be a curſe to mankind rather than a bleſſing.

There is one thing, however, in the above paſſage, wherein we all unite; and this is, that the *value* or *importance* of religious principles is to be eſtimated by their influence on the morals of men. By this rule let the forementioned doctrines, with their oppoſites, be tried. If either thoſe or theſe will not abide the trial, they ought to be rejected.

Before we enter upon a particular examination of the ſubject, however, I would make three or four general obſervations.

Firſt, Whatever Dr. Prieſtley or any others have ſaid, of the immoral tendency of our principles, I am perſuaded that I may take it for granted, they do not mean to ſuggeſt, that we are not good members of civil ſociety, or worthy of the moſt perfect toleration in the ſtate; nor have I any ſuch meaning in what may be ſuggeſted concerning theirs.—I do not know any religious denomination of men, who are unworthy of civil protection. So long as their practices do not diſturb the peace of ſociety, and there be nothing in their avowed principles inconſiſtent with their giving ſecurity for heir good behaviour, they doubtleſs ought to be protected in the enjoyment of every civil right, to which their fellow citizens at large are entitled.

Secondly, It is not the bad conduct of a few individuals, in any denomination of chriſtians, that

proves any thing on either ſide; even though they may be zealous advocates for the peculiar tenets of the party which they eſpouſe. It is the conduct of the *general body* from which we ought to form our eſtimate.—That there are men of bad character who attend on our preaching, is not denied; perhaps ſome of the worſt: but if it be ſo, it proves nothing to the diſhonour of our principles. Thoſe, who, in the firſt ages of chriſtianity, were not humbled by the goſpel, were generally hardened by it. Nay, were it allowed that we have a greater number of *hypocrites* than the Socinians, (as it hath been inſinuated that the *hypocriſy* and *preciſeneſs* of ſome people afford matter of juſt diſguſt to ſpeculative unitarians) I do not think this ſuppoſition, any more than the other, diſhonourable to our principles. The defect of hypocrites lies not ſo much in the thing profeſſed, as in the ſincerity of their profeſſion. The thing profeſſed may be excellent, and perhaps is the more likely to be ſo from its being counterfeited; for it is not uſual to counterfeit things of no value. Thoſe perſons who entertain low and diminutive ideas of the evil of ſin and the dignity of Chriſt, muſt, in order to be thought religious by us, counterfeit the contrary; but, among Socinians, the ſame perſons may avow thoſe ideas, and be careſſed for it. That temper of mind

which we ſuppoſe common to men, as being that which they poſſeſs by nature, need not be diſguiſed among them in order to be well thought of; they have therefore no great temptations to hypocriſy. The queſtion in hand, however, is not, What influence either our principles or theirs have upon perſons who do not in reality adopt them; but, What influence they have upon thoſe who do? *

Thirdly, It is not the good conduct of a few individuals on either ſide that will prove any thing.—Some have adopted a falſe creed, and retain it in words, who yet never enter into the ſpirit of it; and conſequently do not act upon it. But merely dormant opinions can hardly be called *principles:* thoſe, rather, ſeem to be a man's principles, which lie at the foundation of his ſpirit

* Though the Socinians be allowed, in what is ſaid above, to have but few hypocrites among them; yet this is to be underſtood as relating merely to one ſpecies of hypocriſy. Dr. Prieſtley ſpeaking of Unitarians who ſtill continue in the church of England, ſays, "From a juſt averſion to every thing that looks like "*hypocriſy* and *preciſeneſs*, they rather lean to the extreme of "faſhionable diſſipation." Yet he repreſents the ſame perſons, and that in the ſame page, as "continuing to countenance a "mode of worſhip, which, if they were queſtioned about it, "they could not deny to be, according to their own principles, "idolatrous and blaſphemous." *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 96. The hypocriſy, then, to which theſe gentlemen have ſo juſt an averſion, ſeems to be only of *one* kind.

and conduct.—Farther; Good men are found in denominations whoſe principles are very bad; and good men, by whatever names they are called, are more nearly of a ſentiment than they are frequently aware of. Take two of them who differ the moſt in words, and bring them upon their knees in prayer, and they will be nearly agreed.—Beſides, A great deal of that which paſſes for virtue amongſt men, is not ſo in the ſight of God, who ſees things as they are. It is no more than may be accounted for without bringing religion or virtue into the queſtion. There are motives and conſiderations which will commonly influence men, living in ſociety, to behave with decorum. Various occupations and purſuits, eſpecially thoſe of a mental and religious kind, are inconſiſtent with profligacy of manners. *Falſe apoſtles*, the very *miniſters of Satan*, are ſaid to *transform themſelves into the apoſtles of Chriſt*, and to *appear as the miniſters of righteouſneſs; even as Satan himſelf is transformed into an angel of light.** There are certain vices, which, being inconſiſtent with others, may be the means of reſtraining them. Covetouſneſs may be the cauſe of ſobriety; and pride reſtrains thouſands from baſe and ignoble gratifications, in which, nevertheleſs, their hearts take ſecret and ſupreme delight. A decent conduct has been found in pha-

* 2 Cor. xi. 13, 14, 15.

riſees, in infidels, nay even in atheiſts. Dr. Prieſtley acknowledges that "An atheiſt may be "temperate, good-natured, honeſt, and in the "leſs-extended ſenſe of the word, *a virtuous man.*"* Yet Dr. Prieſtley would not from hence infer any thing in favour of the moral tendency of atheiſm.

Laſtly, Neither *zeal* in defence of principles, nor every kind of *devotion* ſpringing from them, will prove thoſe principles to be true, or worthy of God.—Several gentlemen, who have gone over from the Calviniſtic to the Socinian ſyſtem, are ſaid to poſſeſs greater zeal for the propagation of the latter, than they had uſed to diſcover for that of the former. As this, however, makes nothing to the diſadvantage of their ſyſtem, neither does it make any thing to its advantage. This may be owing, for any thing that can be proved to the contrary, to their having found a ſyſtem more conſonant to the bias of their hearts, than that was which they formerly profeſſed.—And as to *devotion*, a ſpecies of this may exiſt in perſons, and that to a high degree, conſiſtent enough with the worſt of principles. We know that the goſpel had no worſe enemies than the *devout and honourable* among the Jews.† Saul, while an enemy to Jeſus Chriſt,

* *Lett. to a Phil. Unb.* Pt. 1. p. 6. pref.

† Acts xiii. 50.

was as ſincere, as zealous, and as devout in his way, as any of thoſe perſons whoſe ſincerity, zeal and devotion, are frequently held up by their admirers in favour of their cauſe.

Theſe obſervations may be thought by ſome, inſtead of clearing the ſubject, to involve it in greater difficulties, and to render it almoſt impoſſible to judge of the tendency of principles by any thing that is ſeen in the lives of men. It is allowed the ſubject *has* its difficulties, and that the foregoing obſervations are a *proof* of it: but I hope to make it appear, whatever difficulties may, on theſe accounts, attend the ſubject, that there is ſtill enough in the general ſpirit and conduct of men, by which to judge of the tendency of their principles.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR TENDENCY TO CONVERT PROFLIGATES TO A LIFE OF HOLINESS.

Chriſtian Brethren,

YOU need not be told, that being *born again—created in Chriſt Jeſus—converted—becoming as a little child*, &c., are phraſes expreſſive of a change of heart, which the ſcriptures make neceſſary to a life of holineſs here, and to eter-

nal life hereafter. It is on this account that I begin with *converſion*, conſidering it as the commencement of a holy life.

A change of this ſort was as really neceſſary for *Nicodemus*, whoſe outward character, for aught appears, was reſpectable, as for *Zacchæus*, whoſe life had been devoted to the ſordid purſuits of avarice. Few, I ſuppoſe, will deny this to be the doctrine taught in the New Teſtament. But, ſhould this be queſtioned, ſhould the neceſſity of a change of heart in ſome characters be denied, ſtill it will be allowed neceſſary in others. Now, as a change is more conſpicuous, and conſequently more convincing, in ſuch perſons who have walked in an abandoned courſe, than in thoſe of a more ſober life, I have fixed upon the converſion of *proſligates*, as a ſuitable topic for the preſent diſcuſſion.

There are two methods of reaſoning which may be uſed in aſcertaining the moral tendency of principles. The firſt is, by comparing the nature of the principles themſelves with the nature of true holineſs, and the agreement or diſagreement of the one with the other. The ſecond is, by referring to plain and acknowledged facts, judging of the nature of cauſes by their effects. Both theſe methods of reaſoning, which are uſually expreſſed by the terms *a priori*, and *a poſteriori*, will be uſed in this and the follow-

ing Letters, as the nature of the ſubject may admit.

True converſion is comprehended in thoſe two grand topics on which the apoſtles inſiſted in the courſe of their miniſtry—*Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.* Let us then fix upon theſe great outlines of the apoſtolic teſtimony, and examine which of the ſyſtems in queſtion has the greateſt tendency to produce them.

Repentance is *a change of mind.* It ariſes from a conviction that we have been in the wrong; and conſiſts in holy ſhame, grief, and ſelf-loathing, accompanied with a determination to forſake every evil way. Each of theſe ideas is included in the account we have of the repentance of Job.* *Behold, I am vile; what ſhall I anſwer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I ſpoken, but I will not anſwer; yea twice, but I will proceed no farther—I abhor myſelf, and repent in duſt and aſhes.* It is eſſential to ſuch a change as this, that the ſinner realizes the evil nature of ſin. No man ever yet repented of a fault, without a conviction of its evil nature. Sin muſt appear *exceeding ſinful,* before we can, in the nature of things, abhor it, and ourſelves on account of it. Thoſe ſentiments which wrought

* Chap. xl. 4. xlii. 6.

upon the heart of David, and brought him to repentance, were of this ſort. Throughout the fifty-firſt Pſalm we find him deeply impreſſed with the evil of ſin, and that conſidered as an offence *againſt God.* He had injured Uriah and Bath-ſheba, and ſtrictly ſpeaking had not injured God, the eſſential honour and happineſs of the divine nature being infinitely beyond his reach; yet as all ſin ſtrikes at the divine glory, and actually degrades it in the eſteem of creatures, all ſin is to be conſidered in one view, as committed *againſt God:* and this view of the ſubject lay ſo near his heart as to ſwallow up every other. *Againſt* THEE, THEE ONLY *have I ſinned, and done this evil in thy ſight!* It follows, then, that the ſyſtem which affords the moſt enlarged views of the evil of ſin, muſt needs have the greateſt tendency to promote repentance for it.

Thoſe who embrace the Calviniſtic ſyſtem believe, that man was originally created holy and happy—that of his own accord he departed from God, and became vile—that God, being in himſelf infinitely amiable, deſerves to be, and is, the moral centre of the intelligent ſyſtem—that rebellion againſt him is oppoſition to the general good—that, if ſuffered to operate according to its tendency, it would deſtroy the well-being of the univerſe, by excluding God, and righteouſneſs, and peace, from the whole ſyſtem—that,

ſeeing it aims deſtruction at univerſal good, and tends to univerſal anarchy and miſchief, it is in thoſe reſpects an infinite evil, and deſerving of endleſs puniſhment—and that, in whatever inſtance God exerciſes forgiveneſs, it is not without reſpect to that public expreſſion of his diſpleaſure againſt it, which was uttered in the death of his Son. Theſe, brethren, are ſentiments which furniſh us with motives for ſelf-abhorrence: under their influence millions have repented in duſt and aſhes.

But thoſe, on the other hand, who embrace the Socinian ſyſtem, entertain diminutive notions of the evil of ſin. They conſider all evil propenſities in men, (except thoſe which are accidentally contracted by education or example) as being in every ſenſe natural to them, ſuppoſing that they were originally created with them: they cannot, therefore, be offenſive to God, unleſs he could be offended with the work of his own hands for being what he made it. Hence, it may be, Socinian writers, when ſpeaking of the ſins of men, deſcribe them in the language of palliation; language tending to convey an idea of pity, but not of blame. Mr. Belſham, ſpeaking of ſin, calls it, "human frailty;" and the ſubjects of it, "the frail and erring children of men."* The

* *Sermon on the Importance of Truth*, p. 33—35.

following poſitions are for ſubſtance maintained by Dr. Prieſtley in his treatiſe on *Neceſſity:* "That for any thing we know, it might have "been as impoſſible for God to make all men "ſinleſs and happy, as to have made them infi-"nite"—That all the evil there is in ſin, ariſes from its tendency to injure the creature—That if God puniſh ſin, it is not becauſe he is ſo diſpleaſed with it as in any caſe to "take vengeance" on the ſinner, ſacrificing his happineſs to the good of the whole; but, knowing that it tends to do the ſinner harm, he puts him to temporary pain, not only for the warning of others, but for his own good, with a view to correct the bad diſpoſition in him—That what is threatened againſt ſin is of ſuch a trifling account, that it need not be an object of dread. "No Neceſſarian," ſays he, "ſuppoſes that any of the human race will "ſuffer eternally; but that future puniſhments "will anſwer the ſame purpoſe as temporal ones "are found to do, all of which tend to good, and "are evidently admitted for that purpoſe; ſo "that God, the author of all, is as much to be "adored and loved for what we *ſuffer* as for "what we *enjoy*, his *intention* being equally kind "in both. And ſince God has created us for "happineſs, what miſery can we fear? If we "be really intended for ultimate, unlimited hap-"pineſs, it is no matter to a truly reſigned per-

"ſon *when*, or *where*, or *how*."* Sin is ſo trifling an affair, it ſeems, and the puniſhment threatened againſt it of ſo little conſequence, that we may be quite reſigned and indifferent, whether we go immediately to heaven, or whether we firſt paſs through the depths of hell!

The queſtion at preſent is not, Which of theſe repreſentations is true, or conſonant to ſcripture; but, Which has the greateſt tendency to promote repentance? If repentance be promoted by a view of the evil of ſin, this queſtion, it is preſumed, may be conſidered as decided.

Another ſentiment intimately connected with the evil of ſin, and equally neceſſary to promote repentance, is, *The equity and goodneſs of the divine law.*—No man ever truly repented for the breach of a law, the precepts of which he conſidered as too ſtrict, or the penalties as too ſevere. In proportion as ſuch an opinion prevails, it is impoſſible but that repentance muſt be precluded. Now the precept of the divine law requires us to love God with all the heart, ſoul, mind, and ſtrength, and our neighbour as ourſelves. It allows not of any leviation, or relaxation, during the whole of our exiſtence. The penalty by which this holy law is enforced, is nothing leſs than the curſe of Almighty God. But, accord-

* Pages 118, 122, 65, 149, 150, 128.

ing to Mr. Belſham, If God "mark and puniſh *every* inſtance of tranſgreſſion," he muſt be a "*mercileſs tyrant;*" and we muſt be "tempted to wiſh that the reins of univerſal government were in better hands."* Mr. Belſham, perhaps, would not deny that perfect obedience *is* required by the law, according to the plain meaning of the words by which it is expreſſed, or that the curſe of God is threatened againſt every one that continueth not in *all things* written in the book of the law to do them; but then this rule is ſo ſtrict, that to "mark and puniſh every inſtance," of deviation from it, would be ſevere and cruel. It ſeems then that God has given us a law, by the terms of which he cannot abide; that juſtice itſelf requires him, if not to abate the precept, yet to remit the penalty, and connive at ſmaller inſtances of tranſgreſſion. I need not enquire how much this reflects upon the moral character and government of God. Suffice it at preſent to ſay, that ſuch views muſt of neceſſity preclude *repentance*. If the law which forbids "every inſtance" of human folly, be unreaſonably ſtrict, and the penalty which threatens the curſe of the Almighty on every one that continueth not in *all things* therein written, be indeed cruel; then it muſt ſo far be unreaſonable for any ſinner to be required to repent for the breach of it. On the contrary, God himſelf ſhould rather repent

* *Serm.* p. 34.

for making such a law, than the sinner for breaking it!

Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, is another essential part of true conversion.—Faith is credence, or belief. Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, is belief of the gospel of salvation through his name. A real belief of the gospel is necessarily accompanied with a *trust* or *confidence* in him for the salvation of our souls. The term *believe* itself sometimes expresses this idea; particularly in 2 Tim. i. 12. *I know whom I have* BELIEVED, *and am persuaded that he is* ABLE TO KEEP THAT WHICH I HAVE COMMITTED UNTO HIM *against that day.* This belief, or trust, can never be fairly understood of a mere confidence in his veracity, as to the truth of his doctrine; for, if that were all, the *ability* of Christ would stand for nothing; and we might as well be said to trust in Peter, or John, or Paul, as in Christ, seeing we believe their testimony to be valid as well as his. Believing, it is granted, does not necessarily, and in all cases, involve the idea of *trust*, for which I here contend; this matter being determined by the nature of the testimony. Neither Peter, nor any of the apostles, ever pretended that their blood, though it might be shed in martyrdom, would be the price of the salvation of sinners. We may therefore credit their testimony, without trusting in them, or *committing* any thing, as Paul

expreſſes it, *into their hands.* But Chriſt's blood *is* teſtified of, as the way and the only way of ſalvation. He is ſaid to be *the propitiation for our ſins;* and *by himſelf to have purged our ſins—Through his blood we have forgiveneſs—Neither is there ſalvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we muſt be ſaved—Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jeſus Chriſt.** Hence it follows, that to believe his teſtimony, muſt of neceſſity involve in it a truſting in him for the ſalvation of our ſouls.

If this be a juſt repreſentation of faith in Jeſus Chriſt, we cannot be at a loſs to decide which of the ſyſtems in queſtion has the greateſt tendency to promote it; and, as faith towards our Lord Jeſus Chriſt is eſſential to true converſion, we cannot heſitate in concluding, which has the greateſt tendency to turn a ſinner from the evil of his ways. Not to mention, at preſent, how Socinian writers diſown an "*implicit belief*" in the teſtimony of the ſacred writers,† and how they lean to their own underſtanding, as the criterion by which ſcripture is to be tried; that which I would here inſiſt upon is, That, upon their principles, all *truſt* or *confidence* in Chriſt for ſalvation is utterly excluded. Not only are

* 1 John iv. 10. Heb. i. 3. Eph. i. 7. Acts iv. 12. 1 Cor. iii. 11.

† Dr. Prieſtley's *Def. of Unit. for* 1787, p. 66.

thoſe principles unadapted to induce us to truſt in Chriſt; but directly tend to turn off our attention and affection from him. Dr. Prieſtley does not appear to conſider him as *the way of a ſinner's ſalvation* in any ſenſe whatever, but goes about to explain the words of Peter, (Acts iv. 12.) *Neither is there ſalvation in any other*, &c., not of "ſalvation to eternal life, but "of ſalvation or deliverance from bodily diſeaſes."* And another writer (Dr. Harwood) of the ſame caſt, in a volume of Sermons lately publiſhed, treats the ſacred writers with ſtill leſs ceremony. Paul had ſaid, *Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jeſus Chriſt;* but this writer, as if he deſigned to affront the apoſtle, makes uſe of his own words in order to contradict him. "Other foundation than this can no man lay," ſays he, "other expectations are viſionary, and "groundleſs and all hopes founded upon any "thing elſe than *a good moral life*, are merely "imaginary, and contrary to the whole tenor of "the goſpel."† Whether theſe things be not aimed to raze the foundation on which the church is built; and whether this be any other than *ſtumbling at the ſtumbling-ſtone*, and a *ſeting him at nought*, in the great affair for which he came into the world, let every chriſtian judge. It particularly deſerves the ſerious conſideration,

* *Familiar Letters*, Let. XIV. † Page 193.

not only of the above writers, but of thoſe who are any way inclined to their mode of thinking: For if it ſhould be ſo that the death of Chriſt, as a propitiatory ſacrifice, is the only medium through which ſinners can be accepted of God; and if they ſhould be found fighting againſt God and rejecting the only way of eſcape, the conſequence may be ſuch as to cauſe the ears of every one that heareth it to tingle. Meanwhile, it requires but little penetration to diſcover, that whatever takes away the only foundation of a ſinner's confidence, cannot be adapted to promote it.

Brethren! Examine theſe matters to the bottom, and judge for yourſelves, whether you might not as well expect grapes of thorns, or figs of thiſtles, as to ſee repentance towards God, or faith towards our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, proceeding from Socinian principles.

The foregoing obſervations ſerve to ſhow *what may be expected* from the Socinian doctrine, according to the nature of things; let us next make ſome inquiry into *matters of fact*. We may judge from the nature of the ſeed ſown what will be the harveſt; but a view of what the harveſt actually is, may afford ſtill greater ſatisfaction.

Firſt, then, Let it be conſidered whether Socinian congregations have ever abounded in converſions of the profane to a life of holineſs

and devotedneſs to God.—Dr. Prieſtley acknowledges that "the goſpel, when it was firſt "preached by the apoſtles, produced a wonder-"ful change in the lives and manners of per-"ſons of all ages."* Now if the doctrine which he and others preach, be the ſame for ſubſtance as that which they preached, one might expect to ſee ſome conſiderable degree of ſimilarity in the effects. But is any thing like this to be ſeen in Socinian congregations? Has that kind of preaching which leaves out the doctrines of man's loſt condition by nature, and ſalvation by grace only, through the atonement of Chriſt; and ſubſtitutes, in their place, the doctrine of mercy without an atonement, the ſimple humanity of Chriſt, the efficacy of repentance, and obedience, &c . . . . Has this kind of preaching, I ſay, ever been known *to lay much hold on the hearts and conſciences of men?* The way in which that "wonderful change" was effected, in the lives and manners of people, which attended the firſt preaching of the goſpel, was, by the word preached *laying hold on their hearts.* It was a diſtinguiſhing mark of primitive preaching, that it *commended itſelf to every man's conſcience.* People could not in general ſit unconcerned under it. We are told of ſome who

* *Let. to a Phil. Unb.* Pref. p. ix.

were *cut to the heart*, and took counſel to ſlay the preachers; and of others who were *pricked in the heart*, and ſaid, Men and brethren, what ſhall we do? But in both caſes the *heart* was the mark at which the preacher aimed, and which his doctrine actually reached. Has the preaching of the Socinians any ſuch effect as this? Do they ſo much as expect it ſhould? Were any of their hearers, by any means, to feel pricked in their hearts, and come to them with the queſtion, *What ſhall we do?* would they not pity them as enthuſiaſts, and be ready to ſuſpect that they had been among the Calviniſts? If any counſel were given, would it not be ſuch as ſhould tend to impede their repentance, rather than promote it; and inſtead of directing them to Jeſus Chriſt, as was the practice of the primitive preachers, would they not endeavour to lead them into another courſe?

Socinian writers cannot ſo much as *pretend*, that their doctrine has been uſed to convert profligate ſinners to the love of God and holineſs. Dr. Prieſtley's ſcheme will not enable him to account for ſuch changes where chriſtianity has ceaſed to be a *novelty*. The abſolute novelty of the goſpel when firſt preached, he repreſents as the cauſe of its wonderful efficacy; but in the preſent age, among perſons who have long heard it, and have contracted vicious habits notwithſtanding, he looks for no ſuch effects. He con-

feſſes himſelf "leſs ſolicitous about the conver-
"ſion of unbelievers *who are much advanced in*
"*life*, than of younger perſons, and that be-
"cauſe he deſpairs of the principles of chriſti-
"anity having much effect upon the lives of
"thoſe whoſe diſpoſitions and habits are already
"formed."* Sometimes he reckons that the great body of primitive chriſtians muſt have been "well-diſpoſed with reſpect to moral virtue, even "before their converſion to chriſtianity; elſe, "(he thinks) they could not have been ſo ready "to have abandoned their vices, and to embrace "a doctrine which required the ſtricteſt purity "and rectitude of conduct, and even to ſacrifice "their lives in the cauſe of truth."† In his treatiſe on *Philoſophical Neceſſity*, he declares, that, "upon the principles of the Neceſſarian, "all late repentance, and eſpecially after long "and confirmed habits of vice, is altogether "and neceſſarily ineffectual, there not being "ſufficient time left to produce a change of

* *Letters to a Phil. Unb. Part II, Pref.* 'It is true, Dr. Priestley is not here speaking of the profligates among nominal christians, but of those among avowed infidels. This, however, makes nothing to the argument. The dispositions and habits of profane nominal christians, are as much formed as those of avowed infidels; and their conversion to a holy life is as much an object of despair as the other. Yea, Dr. Priestley in the same place acknowledges, that, "to be mere nominal christians is worse than to be no christians at all."

† *Lett. to Phil. Unb.* Pt. II. pp. 167, 168.

" diſpoſition and character, which can only be " done by a change of conduct, and of propor- " tionably long continuance. "*

I confeſs, I do not perceive the *conſiſtency* of theſe paſſages with each other. By the power of *novelty* a wonderful change was produced in the lives and manners of men; and yet the body of them muſt have been well-diſpoſed with reſpect to moral virtue; that is, they muſt have been in ſuch a ſtate as not to need any wonderful change, elſe they could not have been ſo ready to abandon their vices. A wonderful change was produced in the lives and manners of men *of all ages;* and yet there is a certain age in which repentance is " altogether and neceſſarily ineffectual." Inconſiſtent, however, as theſe poſitions may be, one thing is ſufficiently evident; viz. That the author conſiders the converſion of profligates, of the preſent age, as an object of deſpair. Whatever the goſpel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John may affirm, that, according to Dr. Prieſtley, affords but very little, if any, hope to thoſe who in ſcripture are diſtinguiſhed by the name of *ſinners, chief of ſinners,* and *loſt.* He does " not " expect ſuch converſion of profligate, and ha- " bitually wicked men, as ſhall make any re- " markable change in their lives and charac-

* Page 156.

" ters. Their diſpoſitions and habits are already " formed, ſo that it can hardly be ſuppoſed to " be in the power of new and better principles " to change them." It cannot be unnatural, or uncandid, to ſuppoſe that theſe obſervations were made from *experience;* or that Dr. Prieſtley writes in this manner on account of his not being uſed to ſee any ſuch effects ariſe from his miniſtry, or the miniſtry of thoſe of his ſentiments.

There is a ſort of preaching, however, even ſince the days of inſpiration, and where chriſtianity hath ceaſed to be a *novelty*, which has been attended, in a good degree, with ſimilar effects to that of the apoſtles. Whatever was the cauſe, or however it is to be accounted for, there have been thoſe whoſe labours have turned *many*, yea many *profligates*, to righteouſneſs; and that by preaching the very doctrines which Dr. Prieſtley charges with being the " corruptions of chriſtianity;" and which a once humble admirer of his attempted to ridicule.* It is well known what ſort of preaching it was that produced ſuch great effects in many nations of Europe, about the time of the Reformation. Whatever different ſentiments were profeſſed by the Reformers, I ſuppoſe they were ſo far agreed, that the doctrines of human depravity,

* See *Familiar Letters*, Lett. xxii. P. S.

the deity and atonement of Chriſt, juſtification by faith, and ſanctification by the influence of the Holy Spirit, were the great topics of their miniſtry.

Since the Reformation there have been ſpecial ſeaſons in the churches, in which a religious concern has greatly prevailed, and multitudes were turned from their evil ways; ſome from an open courſe of profaneneſs, and others from the mere form of godlineſs to the power of it. Much of this ſort of ſucceſs attended the labours of Perkins, Bolton, Taylor, Herbert, Hilderſham, Blackerby, Gouge, Witaker, Bunyan, great numbers of the ejected miniſters, and many ſince their time in England; of Livingſtone, Bruce, Rutherford, M'Cullock, M'Laurin, Robe, Balfour, Sutherland and others in Scotland; of Franck, and his fellow-labourers, in Germany; and of Stoddard, Edwards, Buel, Tennant, and many others in America.* And what Dr. Watts and Dr. Guyſe ſaid of the ſucceſs of Mr. Edwards, and ſome others, in America, might with equal truth have been ſaid of the reſt: "That it was the common "plain Proteſtant doctrine of the Reformation, "without ſtretching towards the Antinomians "on the one ſide, or the Arminians on the "other, that the Spirit of God had been

* See Gillies' *Hiſtorical Collections.*

" pleaſed to honour with ſuch illuſtrious ſuc-
" ceſs."*

Nor are ſuch effects peculiar to paſt ages. A conſiderable degree of the ſame kind of ſucceſs has attended the Calviniſtic churches in North America, within the laſt ten years; eſpecially in the States of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia.† Nor is it peculiar to the Weſtern world, though they have been greatly favoured. I believe there are hundreds of miniſters now in this kingdom, ſome in the eſtabliſhed church, and ſome out of it, who could truly ſay to a conſiderable number of their auditors, as Paul ſaid to the Corinthians; *Ye are our epiſtle, known and read of all men—ye are manifeſtly declared to be the epiſtle of Chriſt, miniſtered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of ſtone, but in fleſhly tables of the heart.* There are likewiſe hundreds of congregations which might with propriety be addreſſed in the language of the ſame apoſtle to the ſame people; *And ſuch were ſome of you;* (namely, fornicators, adulterers, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners,) *but ye are waſhed, but ye are ſanctified, but ye are juſtified.* And thoſe miniſters by whoſe inſtrumentality theſe effects

* *Pref.* to Mr. Edwards' *Narrative.*

† See Rippon's *Baptiſt Register*, for 1790, Part I, II.

were produced, like their predeceſſors before mentioned, have dwelt principally on the Proteſtant doctrines of man's loſt condition by nature, and ſalvation by grace only, through the atoning blood of Chriſt; together with the neceſſity of the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit. When, therefore, they ſee ſuch effects attend their labours, they think themſelves warranted to aſcribe them, as the apoſtle did, *to the name of the Lord Jeſus, and to the Spirit of our God.**

The ſolid and valuable effects produced by this kind of preaching are atteſted by the late Mr. Robinſon of Cambridge, as well as by Dr. Watts, and Dr. Guyſe. "Preſumption and deſpair," ſaid that ingenious writer, "are the "two dangerous extremes to which mankind are "prone in religious concerns. Charging home "ſin precludes the firſt, proclaiming redemption "prevents the laſt. This has been the method "which the Holy Spirit has thought fit to ſeal "and ſucceed in the hands of his miniſters. "Wickliffe, Luther, Knox, Latimer, Gilpin, "Bunyan, Livingſtone, Franck, Blair, Elliot, "Edwards, Whiteſield, Tennant, and *all* who "have been eminently bleſſed to the revival of "*practical godlineſs*, have conſtantly availed "themſelves of this method; and, prejudice

* 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3. 1 Cor. vi. 12.

" apart, it is impoſſible to deny, that great and " excellent moral effects have followed."*

Should it be alleged that Mr. Robinſon, before he died, changed his opinions in theſe matters, and reckoned all ſuch things as theſe *enthuſiaſm;* it might be anſwered, A change of opinion in Mr. Robinſon can make no change in the "facts," as he juſtly calls them, which he did himſelf the honour to record. Beſides, the effects of this kind of preaching are not only recorded by Mr. Robinſon, but by thoſe who triumph in his converſion to their principles. Dr. Prieſtley profeſſes to think highly of the Methodiſts, and acknowledges that they have " civilized and chriſtianized a great part of the " uncivilized and unchriſtianized part of this " country."† Alſo, in his *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, he allows their preaching to produce " more ſtriking effects" than that of Socinians, " and goes about to account for it.‡

A matter of fact ſo notorious as this, and of ſo much conſequence in the controverſy, requires to be well accounted for. Dr. Prieſtley ſeems to have felt the force of the objection that might be made to his principles on this ground, and therefore attempts to obviate it. But by what medium is this attempted? The ſame principle

* *Translation of Claude*, Vol. II. p. 364. Note.

† *Fam. Letters*, Lett. vii. ‡ Page 375.

by which he tries to account for the wonderful ſucceſs of the goſpel in the primitive ages, is to account for the effects produced by ſuch preaching as that of the Methodiſts; *The ignorance of their auditors giving what they ſay to them the force of* NOVELTY. The Doctor is pleaſed to add, "Our people having in general been "brought up in habits of virtue, ſuch great "changes in character and conduct are leſs "neceſſary in their caſe."*

A few remarks in reply to the above ſhall cloſe this Letter.—Firſt, If novelty be indeed that efficacious principle which Dr. Prieſtley makes it to be, one ſhould think it were deſirable every century or two, at leaſt, to have a new diſpenſation of religion.

Secondly, If the great ſucceſs of the primitive preachers was owing to this curious cauſe, Is it not extraordinary that they themſelves ſhould never be acquainted with it, or communicate a ſecret of ſuch importance to their ſucceſſors? They are not only ſilent about it, but in ſome caſes appear to act upon a contrary principle. Paul, when avowing the ſubject matter of his miniſtry before Agrippa, ſeemed to diſclaim every thing *novel*: declaring that he had ſaid *none other things than thoſe which the prophets and Moſes did ſay ſhould come.* And as

* *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 375.

to the cauſe of their ſucceſs, they ſeem never to have thought of any thing but *the hand of the Lord* that *was with them—The working of his mighty power—Who cauſed them to triumph in Chriſt, making manifeſt the ſavour of his knowledge by them in every place.* *

Thirdly, If novelty be what Dr. Prieſtley makes it to be, the plea of Dives had much more of truth in it than the anſwer of Abraham. He pleaded that *if one roſe from the dead, men would repent;* the novelty of the thing, he ſuppoſed, muſt ſtrike them. But Abraham anſwered, as if he had no notion of the power of mere novelty; *If they hear not Moſes and the prophets, neither will they be perſuaded though one riſe from the dead.*

Fourthly, If the ſucceſs of the apoſtles was owing to the novelty of their miſſion, it might have been expected that at Athens, where a taſte for *hearing and telling of new things* occupied the whole attention of the people, their ſucceſs would have been the greateſt. Every body knows that a congeniality of mind in an audience, to the things propoſed, wonderfully facilitates the reception of them. Now, as the goſpel was as much of a novelty to them as to the moſt barbarous nations, and as they were poſ-

* Acts xii, 21. Ephes. i. 19. 2 Cor. ii. 14.

ſeſſed of a peculiar turn of mind which delighted in every thing of that nature, it might have been expected, on the above hypotheſis, that a harveſt of ſouls would there have been gathered in. But inſtead of this, the goſpel is well known to have been leſs ſucceſsful in this famous city than in many other places.

Fifthly, Some of the moſt ſtriking effects, both in early and later ages, were not accompanied with the circumſtance of novelty. The ſermon of Peter to the inhabitants of Jeruſalem* contained no *new* doctrine; it only preſſed upon them the ſame things for ſubſtance which they had heard and rejected from the lips of Chriſt himſelf; and, on a pre-judgment of the iſſue by the uſual courſe of things, they would probably have been conſidered as more likely to reject Peter's doctrine than that of Chriſt; becauſe when once people have ſet their hands to a buſineſs, they are generally more loth to relinquiſh it and own themſelves in the wrong, than at firſt to forbear to engage in it. And as to later times, the effects produced by the preaching of Whiteſield, Edwards, and others, were many of them upon people not remarkably ignorant, but who had attended ſuch kind of preaching all their lives without any ſuch effect. The *former*, it is well known, preached the ſame doctrines in

* Acts i.

Scotland and America, as the people were uſed to hear every Lord's-day; and that with great effect among perſons of a lukewarm and careleſs deſcription. The *latter*, in his *Narrative of the Work of God in and about Northampton*, repreſents the inhabitants as having been "a ra-"tional and underſtanding people." Indeed, they muſt have been ſuch, or they could not have underſtood the compaſs of argument contained in Mr. Edwards's *Sermons on Juſtification*, which were delivered about that time, and are ſaid to have been the means of great religious concern among the hearers. Nor were theſe effects produced by airs and geſtures, or any of thoſe extraordinary things in the manner of the preacher, which give a kind of novelty to a ſermon, and ſometimes tend to move the affections of the hearers. Mr. Prince, who, it ſeems, had often heard Mr. Edwards preach, and obſerved the remarkable conviction which attended his miniſtry, deſcribes in his *Chriſtian Hiſtory* his manner of preaching. "He was a preacher," ſays he, "of a low and moderate voice, a natural "delivery, and without any agitation of body, "or any thing elſe in the manner to excite at-"tention, except his habitual and great ſolem-"nity, looking and ſpeaking as in the preſence "of God, and with a weighty ſenſe of the mat-"ter delivered." *

* *Gillies' Hiſtorical Collections*, Vol. II. p. 196.

Sixthly, Suppoſe the circumſtance of novelty to have great efficacy, the queſtion is, with reſpect to ſuch preaching as that of the Methodiſts, Whether it has efficacy enough to render *the truth of the doctrine* of no account? It is well known that the main doctrines which the Methodiſts have taught, are, *Man's loſt condition by nature, and ſalvation by the atonement of Chriſt:* but theſe, according to Dr. Prieſtley, are falſe doctrines; no part of chriſtianity, but the "corruptions" of it; and "ſuch as muſt tend, if they have any "effect, to relax the obligations to virtue." But if ſo, How came it to paſs that the preaching of them ſhould "civilize and chriſtianize mankind?" Novelty may do wonders, it is granted; but ſtill the nature of thoſe wonders will correſpond with the nature of the principles taught. All that it can be ſuppoſed to do, is to give additional energy to the principles which it accompanies. The heating of a furnace ſeven times hotter than uſual, would not endue it with the properties of water; and water put into the moſt powerful motion, would not be capable of producing the effects of fire. One would think it were equally evident, that falſehood, though accompanied with novelty, could never have the effect of truth.

Once more: It may be queſtioned, Whether the generality of people who make up Socinian congregations ſtand in leſs need of a change of

character and conduct than others? Mr. Belſham ſays, that "rational chriſtians are often repre-"ſented as indifferent to practical religion;" and admits, though with apparent reluctance, that "there has been ſome plauſible ground for "the accuſation." Dr. Prieſtley admits the ſame thing, and they both go about to account for it in the ſame way.* Now whether their method of accounting for it be juſt or not, they admit the fact; and from hence we may conclude, that the generality of "rational chriſtians" are not ſo righteous as to need no repentance; and that the reaſon why their preaching does not turn ſinners to righteouſneſs, is not owing to their want of an equal proportion of ſinners to be turned.

But, ſuppoſing the ſocinian congregations were generally ſo virtuous as to need no great change of character; or if they did, ſo well informed that nothing could ſtrike them as a novelty; that is not the caſe with the bulk of mankind amongſt whom they live. Now, if a great change of character may be produced by the mere power of novelty, Why do not Dr. Prieſtley, and thoſe of his ſentiments, go forth, like ſome others, to *the highways and hedges?* Why does not he ſurprize the benighted populace into the love of God

* *Mr. Belsham's Serm.* p. 32. *Dr. Priestley's Discourses on various Subjects*, p. 95.

and holineſs, with his *new* doctrines? (New he muſt acknowledge they are to them.) If falſe doctrine, ſuch as that which the Methodiſts have taught, may, through the power of novelty, do ſuch wonders, what might not be expected from the true? I have been told that Dr. Prieſtley has expreſſed a wiſh to go into the ſtreets, and preach to the common people. Let him, or thoſe of his ſentiments, make the trial. Though the people of Birmingham have treated him ſo uncivilly, I hope both he and they would meet with better treatment in other parts of the country; and if by the power of novelty they can turn but a few ſinners from the error of their ways, and ſave their ſouls from death, it will be an object worthy of their attention.

But ſhould Dr. Prieſtley, or any others of his ſentiments, go forth on ſuch an errand, and ſtill retain their principles, they muſt reverſe the declaration of our Lord, and ſay, *We come not to call ſinners, but the righteous to repentance.* All their hope muſt be in the uncontaminated youth, or the better ſort of people, whoſe habits in the paths of vice are not ſo ſtrong but that they may be overcome. Should they, in the courſe of their labours, behold a malefactor approaching the hour of his execution, What muſt they do? Alas, like the prieſt and the levite, they muſt *paſs by on the other ſide.* They could not ſo much as admoniſh him to repentance, with any degree of hope; be-

cauſe they conſider " all late repentance, and " eſpecially after long and confirmed habits of " vice, as abſolutely and neceſſarily ineffectual."* Happy for many a poor wretch of that deſcription, happy eſpecially for the poor thief upon the croſs, that Jeſus Chriſt acted on a different principle!

Theſe, brethren, are matters that come within the knowledge of every man of obſervation; and it behoves you in ſuch caſes to know *not the ſpeech of them that are puffed up, but the power.*

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR TENDENCY TO CONVERT PROFESSED UNBELIEVERS.

Chriſtian Brethren,

SOCINIAN writers are very ſanguine on the tendency of their views of things to convert Infidels; namely, Jews, Heathens, and Mahometans. They reckon that our notions of the Trinity form the grand obſtacle to their converſion. Dr. Prieſtley often ſuggeſts, that ſo long as we maintain the Deity of Jeſus Chriſt, there is no hope of converting the Jews, becauſe this doctrine contradicts the firſt principle of their religion, *the*

* See Dr. Prieſtley's *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 238. Alſo *his Doctrine of Phil. Neceſſity*, p. 156.

Unity of God. Things, not altogether, but nearly ſimilar, are ſaid concerning the converſion of the Heathens, and Mahometans, eſpecially the latter. On this ſubject the following obſervations are ſubmitted to your conſideration.

With reſpect to the *Jews*, they know very well that thoſe who believe in the Deity of Chriſt, *profeſs* to believe in the unity of God; and if *they* will not admit this to be conſiſtent, they muſt depart from what is plainly implied in the language of their anceſtors. If the Jews in the time of Chriſt had thought it impoſſible, or, which is the ſame thing, inconſiſtent with the unity of God, that God the Father ſhould have a Son equal to himſelf, How came they to attach the idea of *equality* to that of Sonſhip? Jeſus aſſerted that God was his *own Father;* which they underſtood as making himſelf *equal with God;* and therefore ſought to kill him as a blaſphemer.* Had the Jews affixed thoſe ideas to ſonſhip which are entertained by our opponents; namely, as implying nothing more than ſimple humanity, Why did they accuſe Jeſus of blaſphemy for aſſuming it? They did not deny that, to be God's *own Son*, was to be equal with the Father; nor did they allege that ſuch an equality would deſtroy the divine unity; a thought of this kind ſeems never to have occurred to their minds. The idea to which they

* John v. 18.

objected was, *That Jeſus of Nazareth was the Son of God;* and hence, it is probable, the profeſſion of this great article was conſidered in the apoſtolic age as the criterion of chriſtianity.* Were this article admitted by the modern Jews, they muſt reaſon differently from their anceſtors, if they ſcrupled to admit that Chriſt is equal with the Father.

The Jews were greatly offended at our Lord's words; and his not explaining them ſo as to remove the ſtumbling-block out of the way, may ſerve to teach us how we ought to proceed in removing ſtumbling-blocks out of the way of their poſterity. *For this cauſe they ſought to kill him—becauſe he had ſaid that God was his Father,* MAKING HIMSELF EQUAL WITH GOD—*Jeſus ſaid, I and my Father are one. They then took up ſtones to ſtone him.* When he told them of *many good works that he had ſhewn them;* and aſked, *For which of thoſe works do ye ſtone me?* They replied, *For a good work we ſtone thee not, but for blaſphemy; and becauſe thou,* BEING A MAN, MAKEST THYSELF GOD.† From hence it is evident, that, whether Jeſus Chriſt be truly God, or not, they underſtood him as aſſerting that ſo he *was;* that is, they underſtood his claiming the relation of *God's own Son,* and declaring that *He and his Fa-*

* Acts viii. 37. † John v. 18. x. 30, 33.

ther were one, as implying ſo much. This was their ſtumbling-block. Nor does it appear that Jeſus did any thing towards removing it out of their way. It is certain he did not ſo remove it, as to afford them the leaſt ſatisfaction; for they continued to think him guilty of the ſame blaſphemy to the laſt, and for that adjudged him worthy of death. * If Jeſus *never thought of being equal with God,* it is a pity there ſhould have been ſuch a miſunderſtanding between them; a miſunderſtanding that proved the occaſion of putting him to death!

Such an hypotheſis, to be ſure, may anſwer one end; it may give us a more favourable idea of the conduct of the Jews than we have been wont to entertain. If it does not entirely juſtify their procedure, it greatly extenuates it. They erred, it ſeems, in imagining that Jeſus, in declaring himſelf *the Son of God,* made himſelf *equal with God;* and thus, through miſtaking his meaning, put him to death as a blaſphemer. But, then, it might be pleaded on their behalf, that Jeſus never ſuggeſted that they were in an error in that matter—that, inſtead of informing them that the name *Son of God* implied nothing more than ſimple humanity, he went on to ſay, among other things, *That all men ſhould honour the Son even as they honour the Father.* And inſtead of diſown-

* Matt. xxvi. 63, 66.

ing with abhorrence the idea of making himſelf *God*, he ſeemed to juſtify it, by arguing from the leſs to the greater; from the image of the thing to the thing itſelf.* Now theſe things conſidered, ſhould an impartial jury ſit in judgment upon their conduct, one would think they could not, with Stephen, bring it in *murder;* to make the moſt of it, it could be nothing worſe than manſlaughter. All this may tend to conciliate the Jews, as it tends to roll away the reproach which, in the eſteem of chriſtians, lies upon their anceſtors, for crucifying the Lord of Glory: but whether it will have any influence towards their converſion, is another queſtion. It is poſſible that, in proportion as it confirms their good opinion of their forefathers, it may confirm their ill opinion of Jeſus, for having, by his obſcure and ambiguous language, given occaſion for ſuch a miſunderſtanding between them. Could the Jews but once be brought to feel that temper of mind which, it is predicted in their own prophets, they ſhall feel; could they but *look on him whom they have pierced, and mourn for him as one mourneth for his only ſon, and be in bitterneſs for him as one that is in bitterneſs for his firſt born;* I ſhould be under no apprehenſions for their acknowleging his proper Divinity, or embracing

* John v. 18. and x. 34—36.

him as the great atonement, to the *fountain* of whoſe blood they would joyfully repair, that they might be cleanſed from their ſin and their uncleanneſs. *

Nearly the ſame things might be obſerved reſpecting *Heathens* and *Mahometans*. We may ſo model the goſpel as almoſt to accommodate it to their taſte, and by this means we may come nearer together; but whether, in ſo doing, we ſhall not be rather converted to them, than they to us, deſerves to be conſidered. Chriſtianity may be ſo heathenized, that a man may believe in it, and yet be no chriſtian. Were it true, therefore, that Socinianiſm had a tendency to induce profeſſed infidels, by meeting them as it were half-way, to take upon them the chriſtian name, ſtill it would not follow that it was of any real uſe. The Popiſh Miſſionaries, of the laſt century, in China, acted upon the principle of accommodation. They gave up the main things in which Chriſtians and Heathens had been uſed to differ, and allowed the Chineſe every favourite ſpecies of idolatry. The conſequence was, they had a great many converts, ſuch as they were; but thinking people looked upon the Miſſionaries as more converted to Heatheniſm, than the Chineſe Heathens to Chriſtianity. †

* Zech. xii. 10—14. xiii. 1. † Millar's *Propagation of Chriſtianity*, Vol. II. pp. 388, 438.

But even this effect is more than may be expected from Socinian doctrine among the Heathen. The Popiſh Miſſionaries had engines to work with, which Socinians have not. They were ſent by an authority, which, at that time, had weight in the world; and their religion was accompanied with pomp and ſuperſtition. Theſe were matters, which, though far from recommending their miſſion to the approbation of ſerious chriſtians, yet would be ſure to recommend it to the Chineſe. They ſtripped the goſpel of all its *real* glory; and in its place ſubſtituted a *falſe* glory. But Socinianiſm, while it diveſts the goſpel of all that is intereſting and affecting to the ſouls of men, ſubſtitutes nothing in its place. If it be chriſtianity at all, it is, as the ingenious Mrs. Barbauld is ſaid in time paſt to have expreſſed it, "Chriſtianity in the frigid zone." It may be expected, therefore, that no conſiderable number of profeſſed Infidels will ever think it worthy of their attention. Like *the Jew*, they will pronounce every attempt to convert them by theſe accommodating principles *nugatory;* and be ready to aſk, with him, *What they ſhall do more by embracing chriſtianity, than they already do?* *

Dr. Prieſtley, however, is for *coming to action.* "Let a free intercourſe be opened, ſays

* Mr. Levi's *Letters to Dr. Prieſtley*, pp. 76, 77.

" he, between Mahometans and rational, that " is, Unitarian Chriſtians, and I ſhall have no " doubt with reſpect to the conſequence." * And again, " Let the Hindoos, as well as the " Mahometans, become acquainted with our li- " terature, and have free intercourſe with *Uni-* " *tarian Chriſtians*, and I have no doubt but " the reſult will be in favour of Chriſtianity." † So, then, when Heathens and Mahometans are to be converted, Trinitarians, like thoſe of Gideon's army, that bowed down upon their knees to drink, muſt ſit at home; and the whole of the expedition, it ſeems, muſt be conducted by Unitarians, as by the three hundred men that lapped. Poor Trinitarians; deemed unworthy of an intercourſe with Heathens! Well, if you muſt be denied, as by a kind of *Teſt-act*, the

† " Rational, that is, Unitarian Christians"——Why need Dr. Priestley be so particular in informing his reader that a *rational* christian signifies a *Unitarian* christian? To be sure, all the world knew long enough ago that *rationality* was confined to the Unitarians. Doubtless, they are the people, and wisdom will die with them. When Dr. Priestley speaks of persons of his own sentiments, he calls them " *rational christians.*" When in the same page, speaking of such as differ from him, he calls them, " Those who *assume* to themselves the distinguishing title " of Orthodox." *Consider. on Differ. of Opin.* § 3. Query, Is the letter of these names *assumed* any more than the former? And is Dr. Priestley a fit person to reprove a body of people for assuming a name which implies what their adversaries do not admit?

* *Litt. to a Phil. Unb.* Part II. pp. 116, 121.

privilege of bearing arms in this divine war, ſurely you have a right to expect that thoſe who ſhall be poſſeſſed of it, ſhould act valiantly, and do exploits. But what ground have you on which to reſt your expectations? None, except Dr. Prieſtley's good conceit of his opinions. When was it known that any conſiderable number of Heathens or Mahometans were converted by the Socinian doctrine? Sanguine as the Doctor is on this ſubject, Where are the *facts* on which his expectations are founded?

Trinitarians, however, whether Dr. Prieſtley think them worthy or not, have gone among the Heathens, and that not many years ago, and preached what they thought the goſpel of Chriſt; and I may add, from facts that cannot be diſputed, with conſiderable ſucceſs. The *Dutch*, the *Danes*, and the *Engliſh*, have each made ſome attempts in the Eaſt; and, I hope, not without ſome good effects. If we were to call that converſion, which many profeſſors of chriſtianity would call ſo without any ſcruple, we might boaſt of the converſion of a great many thouſands in thoſe parts. But it is acknowledged that many of the converſions in the Eaſt were little, if any thing, more than a change of denomination. The greateſt and beſt work, and the moſt worthy of the name of converſion, of which I have read, is that which has taken place by the labours of the Anglo-Americans among the

natives. They have indeed wrought wonders. Mr. Elliot, the firſt miniſter who engaged in this work, went over to New-England in 1632; and, being warmed with a holy zeal for converting the natives, learned their language, and preached to them in it. He alſo, with great labour, tranſlated the Bible, and ſome Engliſh treatiſes, into the ſame language. God made him eminently uſeful for the turning of theſe poor Heathens to himſelf. He ſettled a number of chriſtian churches, and ordained elders over them from among themſelves. After a life of unremitted labour in this important undertaking, he died in a good old age, and has ever ſince been known, both among the Engliſh and the natives, by the name of, *The Apoſtle of the American Indians.*

Nor were theſe converts like many of thoſe in the Eaſt, who profeſſed they knew not what, and in a little time went off again as faſt as they came: the generality of them underſtood and felt what they profeſſed, and perſevered to the end of their lives. Mr. Elliot's example ſtimulated many others; ſome in his life-time, and others after his death, laboured much, and were bleſſed to the converſion of thouſands among the Indians. The names and labours of Bourn, Fitch, Mahew, Pierſon, Gookin, Thatcher, Rawſon, Treat, Tupper, Cotton, Walter, Sargeant, Davenport, Park, Horton, Brainerd, and Ed-

wards, are remembered with joy and gratitude in thoſe benighted regions of the earth. Query, Were ever any ſuch effects as theſe wrought by preaching Socinian doctrines?

Great things have been done among the heathens of late years by the *Moravians.* About the year 1733, they ſent miſſionaries to *Greenland;* a moſt inhoſpitable country indeed, but containing about "ten thouſand inhabitants," all inveloped in pagan darkneſs. After the labour of ſeveral years, apparently in vain, ſucceſs attended their efforts; and in the courſe of twenty or thirty years, about ſeven hundred heathens are ſaid to have been baptized, and to have lived the life of Chriſtians.*—They have done great good alſo in the moſt northern parts of North-America, among the *Eſkimeaux;* and ſtill more among the Negroes in the Weſt-India Iſlands; where, at the cloſe of 1788, upwards of *thirteen thouſand* of thoſe poor, injured, and degraded people, were formed into chriſtian ſocieties. The views of Moravians, it is true, are different from ours in ſeveral particulars, eſpecially in matters relating to church-government and diſcipline; but they appear to poſſeſs a great deal of godly ſimplicity: and as to the doctrines which they inculcate, they are moſtly what we eſteem evan-

* See Crantz's *Hiſt. of Greenland.*

gelical. The doctrine of atonement by the death of Chriſt, in particular, forms the great ſubject of their miniſtry. The firſt perſon in Greenland who appeared willing to receive the goſpel, was an old man, who came to the miſſionaries for inſtruction. "We told him," (ſay they) "as well "as we could, of the creation of man, and the "intent thereof, of the fall and corruption of "nature, of the redemption effected by Chriſt, "of the reſurrection of all men, and eternal "happineſs, or damnation." They inform us afterwards, that the doctrine of the croſs, or "the Creator's taking upon him human nature, and dying for our ſins," was the moſt powerful means of impreſſing the minds of the heathen, and of turning their hearts to God. "On this "account, (they add) we determined, like Paul, "to know nothing but Jeſus Chriſt, and him "crucified."

Now conſider, brethren, were there ever any ſuch effects as the above wrought by the Socinian doctrine? If there were, let them be brought to light. Nay, let a ſingle inſtance be produced of a Socinian teacher having ſo much virtue or benevolence in him, as to make the attempt; ſo much virtue or benevolence, as to venture among a race of barbarians, merely with a view to their converſion.

But we have unbelievers at home: and Dr. Prieſtley, perſuaded of the tendency of his prin-

ciples to convert, has lately made ſome experiments upon them, as being within his reach. He has done well. There is nothing like *experiment* in religion, as well as in philoſophy. As to what tendency his ſentiments *would have* upon Heathens and Mahometans, provided a free intercourſe could be obtained, it is all conjecture. The beſt way to know their efficacy is by *trial*, and trial has been made. Dr. Prieſtley has addreſſed *Letters to a Philoſophical Unbeliever*, and *Letters to the Jews*. Whether this ſeed will ſpring up, it is true, we muſt not yet decide. Some little time after he had publiſhed, however, he himſelf acknowledged, "I do not know that my book has converted a ſingle unbeliever." * Perhaps he might ſay the ſame ſtill: and that not only of his *Letters to a Philoſophical Unbeliever*, but of thoſe *To the Jews*.

If the opinion of the Jews may in any degree be collected from the anſwer of their champion, *Mr. David Levi*, ſo far are they from being convinced of the truth of Chriſtianity by Dr. Prieſtley's writings, that they ſuſpect whether he himſelf be a Chriſtian. "Your doctrine, (ſays Mr. "Levi) is ſo oppoſite to what I always under-"ſtood to be the principles of Chriſtianity, that "I muſt ingenuouſly confeſs I am greatly puz-

* *Letters to Mr. Hammon.*

" zled to reconcile your principles to the attempt. " What! a writer that aſſerts that *the miraculous* " *conception of Jeſus does not appear to him to be* " *ſufficiently authenticated, and that the original* " *Goſpel of St. Matthew did not contain it,* ſet up " for a defender of chriſtianity againſt the Jews! " is ſuch an inconſiſtency as I did not expect to " meet with in a philoſopher, whoſe ſole purſuit " hath been in ſearch of truth—You are pleaſed " to declare in plain terms *that you do not believe* " *in the miraculous conception of Jeſus,* and that " you *are of opinion that he was the legitimate ſon* " *of Joſeph.* After ſuch aſſertions as theſe, how " you can be entitled to the appellation of a " Chriſtian, in the ſtrict ſenſe of the word, is to " me really incomprehenſible—If I am not great- " ly miſtaken, I verily believe that the honour " of Jeſus, or the propagation of Chriſtianity, " are things of little moment in your ſerious " thoughts, notwithſtanding all your boaſted " ſincerity."* To ſay nothing of the opinion of the Jews *concerning what is chriſtianity,* having all the weight that is uſually attributed to the judgment of impartial by-ſtanders, the above quotations afford but little reaſon to hope for their converſion to chriſtianity by ſocinian doctrines.

But ſtill, it may be ſaid, we know not what is to come. True; but this we know, that if any

* *Mr. David Levi's Letters to Dr. Prieſtley.*

conſiderable fruit ariſe from the Addreſſes above referred to, *it is yet to come;* and not from thoſe addreſſes only, but, I am inclined to think, from any thing that has been attempted by Socinians for the converſion of unbelievers.

Is it not a fact, that ſocinian principles render men indifferent to this great object, and even induce them to treat it with contempt? The *Monthly Reviewers*, in reviewing Mr. *Carey's* late publication on this ſubject, infer from his acknowledgements of the baneful influence of *wicked* Europeans in their intercourſe with Heathens, and the great corruptions among the various denominations of profeſſing chriſtians, that if ſo, "far better is the light of nature as communicated to "them by their Creator, than any light that our "officiouſneſs diſpoſes us to carry to them."* By Europeans, who have communicated their vices to heathens, Mr. Carey undoubtedly meant, not thoſe miniſters of the goſpel, or thoſe ſerious chriſtians, who have gone among them for their good; but navigators, merchants, and adventurers, whoſe ſole object was to enrich themſelves: and though he acknowleges a great deal of degeneracy and corruption to have infected the chriſtian world, yet the qualifications which he requires in a miſſionary might have ſecured his propoſal from cenſure, and doubtleſs would have

* *Monthly Review*, for Dec. 1792, p. 447.

done ſo, had not the Reviewers been diſpoſed to throw cold water upon every ſuch undertaking. If, indeed, there be none to be found among profeſſing chriſtians, except ſuch, who, by their intercourſe with heathens, would only render their ſtate worſe than it was before, let the deſign be given up; but, if otherwiſe, the objection is of no force.

The Reviewers will acknowledge, that great corruptions have attended the civil government of Europe, not excepting that of our own country; and, that we are conſtantly engaged in diſſentions on the ſubject: yet, I have no doubt but they could find certain individuals, who, if they were placed in the midſt of an uncivilized people, would be capable of affording them ſubſtantial aſſiſtance; would teach them to eſtabliſh good laws, good order, and equal liberty. Nor would they think of concluding, becauſe European conquerors and courtiers, knowing no higher motive than ſelf-intereſt, inſtead of meliorating the condition of uncivilized nations, have injured it, that therefore it was vain for any European to think of doing otherwiſe. Neither would they regard the ſneers of the enemies of civil liberty and equity, who might deride them as a *little flock* of conceited politicians, or at beſt of inexperienced philanthropiſts, whoſe plans might amuſe in the cloſet, but would not bear in real life. Why

is it that we are to be ſceptical and inactive in nothing but religion?

Had Mr. Carey, after the example of Dr. Prieſtley, propoſed that his *own denomination only* ſhould open an intercourſe with Heathens, the Reviewers would have accuſed him of *illiberality;* and now, when he propoſes that, "other "denominations ſhould engage ſeparately in "promoting miſſions," this, it is ſaid, would be "ſpreading our religious diſſentions over the "globe." How, then, are theſe gentlemen to be pleaſed? By ſitting ſtill, it ſhould ſeem, and perſuading ourſelves that it is impoſſible to find out what is true religion; or, if not, that it is but of little importance to diſſeminate it. But why is it, I again aſk, that we are to be ſceptical and inactive in nothing but religion? The reſult is this: Socinianiſm, ſo far from being friendly to the converſion of Unbelievers, is neither adapted to the end, nor favourable to the means; to thoſe means, however, by which *it has pleaſed God to ſave them that believe.*

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

THE ARGUMENT, FROM THE NUMBER OF CONVERTS TO SOCINIANISM, EXAMINED.

Christian Brethren,

IF *facts* be admitted as evidence, perhaps it will appear that Socinianiſm is not ſo much adapted to make converts of Jews, Heathens, Mahometans, or Philoſophical Unbelievers, as of a ſpeculating ſort of people among profeſſing Chriſtians. Theſe in our own country are found, ſome in the eſtabliſhed church, and ſome among diſſenters. Among people of this deſcription, I ſuppoſe, ſocinianiſm has gained conſiderable ground. Of this, Dr. Prieſtley, and others of his party, are frequently making their boaſt. * But whether they have any cauſe for boaſting, even in this caſe, may be juſtly doubted.

In the firſt place, Let it be conſidered, that, though ſocinianiſm may gain ground among ſpeculating *individuals*, yet the congregations where that ſyſtem, or what bears a near reſemblance to it, is taught, are greatly upon the decline.—There are, at this time, a great many places of worſhip in this kingdom, eſpecially among the *Preſbyterians*, and the *General Baptiſts*, where the So-

* *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, pp. 93, 94.

cinian and Arian doctrines have been taught till the congregations are gradually dwindled away, and there are ſcarcely enow left to keep up the form of worſhip. There is nothing in either of theſe ſyſtems, comparatively ſpeaking, that alarms the conſcience, or intereſts the heart; and therefore the congregations where they are taught, unleſs kept up by the accidental popularity of a preacher, or ſome other circumſtance, diſtinct from the doctrine delivered, generally fall into decay.

But, farther, Let us examine a little more particularly, what ſort of people they, in general, are, who are converted to Socinianiſm—It is an object worthy of inquiry, whether they appear to be modeſt, humble, ſerious chriſtians; ſuch as have known the plague of their own hearts; ſuch in whom tribulation hath wrought patience, and patience experience; ſuch who know WHOM they have believed, and who have learned to count all things but loſs for the excellency of the knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus their Lord; ſuch who, in their inveſtigation of ſentiments, have been uſed to mingle earneſt and humble prayer with patient and impartial enquiry; ſuch, in fine, who have become as little children in their own eyes? *If they be*, it is a circumſtance of conſequence, not ſufficient indeed to juſtify their change of ſentiments, but to render that change an object of at-

tention. When perſons of this deſcription embrace a ſet of new principles, it becomes a matter of ſerious conſideration, what could induce them to do ſo. But *if they be not*, their caſe deſerves but little regard. When the body of converts to a ſyſtem are mere ſpeculatiſts in religion, men of little or no ſerioufneſs, and who pay no manner of attention to vital and practical religion, it reflects neither honour on the cauſe they have eſpouſed, nor diſhonour on that which they have rejected. When we ſee perſons of this ſtamp go over to the ſocinian ſtandard, it does not at all ſurpriſe us; on the contrary, we are ready to ſay, as the apoſtle ſaid of the defection of ſome of the profeſſors of chriſtianity in his day, *They went out from us, but they were not of us.*

That many of the ſocinian converts were previouſly men of no ſerious religion, needs no other proof than the acknowlegement of Dr. Prieſtley, and of Mr. Belſham. It cannot be denied, (ſays the former) "that many of thoſe "who judge ſo truly, concerning particular tenets "in religion, have attained to that cool unbiaſs-"ed temper of mind in conſequence of becoming "more indifferent to religion in general, and to "all the modes and doctrines of it." And this indifference to *all religion* is conſidered by Dr. Prieſtley as "favourable to a diſtinguiſhing be-tween "truth and falſehood."* Much to the ſame

* *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 65.

purpoſe is what Mr. Belſham alleges, as quoted before, that, "Men who are moſt indifferent to "the *practice* of religion, and whoſe minds there- "fore are leaſt attached to any ſet of principles, "will ever be the firſt to ſee the abſurdity of a "popular ſuperſtition, and to embrace a rational "ſyſtem of faith."* It is eaſy to ſee, one ſhould think, from hence, what ſort of characters thoſe are which compoſe the body of ſocinian converts.

Dr. Prieſtley, however, conſiders this circumſtance as reflecting no diſhonour upon his principles. He thinks he has fully accounted for it. So thinks Mr. Belſham, and ſo think the Monthly Reviewers, in their Review of Mr. Belſham's Sermon. †

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* *Serm. on Import. of Truth*, p. 32.

† I have not ſcrupled to claſs the *Monthly Reviewers* among Socinians. Although in a work of that kind there be frequently, no doubt, a change of hands; yet it is eaſy to ſee that of late years (a very ſhort interval excepted) it has been principally, if not entirely, under Socinian direction; and, ſo far as religion is concerned, has been uſed as an inſtrument for the propagation of that ſyſtem. Impartiality towards Calviniſtic writers is not, therefore, to be expected from that quarter. It is true, they ſometimes affect to ſtand aloof from all parties; but it is mere *affectation*. Nothing can be more abſurd than to expect them to judge impartially in a cauſe wherein they themſelves are parties; abſurd however as it is, ſome perſons are weak enough to be impoſed upon by their pretences. Perhaps of late years, the *Monthly Review* has more contributed to the ſpreading of Socinianiſm, than all other writings put together. The plan of that work does not admit of *argumentation*; a ſudden flaſh of wit is

Surely Socinians muſt be wretchedly driven, or they would not have recourſe to ſuch a refuge as that of acknowleging that they hold a goſpel, the beſt preparative for which is a being *deſtitute of all religion!* "What a reflection is here implied," ſays Dr. Williams, "on the moſt eminent "Reformers of every age, who were the firſt to "ſee the abſurdities of a popular ſuperſtition, and "the falſity of reigning principles! What a poor "compliment to the religious character of Uni-"tarian reformers! According to this account, "one might be tempted to aſk—Was it by be-"ing indifferent to the practice of religion that "Mr. Belſham was qualified to ſee and pro-"nounce Calviniſm to be *gloomy* and *erroneous*, "an *unamiable* and *melancholy* ſyſtem? Charity "forbids us to think he was thus qualified; and "if ſo, by his own rule he is no very competent "judge; except he is pleaſed to adopt the alter-"native, that he is only the humble follower "of more *ſagacious*, but *irreligious* guides."*

generally reckoned ſufficient to diſcredit a Calviniſtic performance; and this juſt ſuits the turn of thoſe who are *deſtitute of all religion.* A laborious inveſtigation of matters would not ſuit their temper of mind; they had rather ſubſcribe to the well-known maxim, that, "Ridicule is the teſt of truth:" and then, whenever the Reviewers hold up a doctrine as ridiculous, they have nothing to do but to join the laugh, and conclude it to be a "vulgar error, or a popular ſuperſtition."

* *Diſcourſe on the Influence of Religious Practice, upon our Enquiries after Truth,* in Anſwer to Mr. Belſham's Sermon, p. 6.

We read of different kinds of preparatives in the ſcriptures; but I do not recollect that they contain any thing like the above. Zeal and attention, a diſpoſition to *ſearch* and *pray*, according to Solomon, is a preparative for the diſcovery of truth.* The piety of Cornelius, which he exerciſed according to the opportunities he poſſeſſed of obtaining light, was a preparative for his reception of the goſpel as ſoon as he heard it.† And this accords with our Lord's declaration: *He that will do his will ſhall know of his doctrine.* On the other hand, The cold indifference of ſome in the apoſtolic age, *who received not the love of the truth*, but, as it ſhould ſeem, held it with a looſe hand, even while they profeſſed it, was equally a preparative for apoſtaſy.‡ We alſo read of ſome in Iſaiah's time, who, "leaned very much to a life of diſſipation;" they *erred through wine. All tables are full of vomit, and filthineſs*, (ſaith the prophet, deſcribing one of their aſſemblies) *ſo that there is no place.* He adds, *Whom ſhall he teach knowledge, and whom ſhall he make to underſtand doctrine?* And what is the anſwer? "Were "the men who leaned to a life of diſſipation," who loved to ſuck at the breaſts of ſenſual indulgence, the proper ſubjects? No; *thoſe that were weaned from the breaſts, and drawn from the*

* Prov. ii. 1—9. † Acts x. ‡ 2 Thes. ii. 10.

*milk.** But now, it ſeems, the caſe is altered; and, in order to find out truth, the moſt likely way is to be diveſted of *all religion!*

It is true, theſe things are ſpoken of what are called "ſpeculative Unitarians," whom Dr. Prieſtley calls "men of the world," and diſtinguiſhes them from "ſerious chriſtians." He endeavours alſo to guard his cauſe by obſerving, That the bulk of profeſſing chriſtians, or of thoſe who ſhould have ranked as chriſtians, in every age, have been of this deſcription. It muſt be acknowledged, that there have been lukewarm, diſſipated, and merely nominal chriſtians, in all ages of the church, and in every denomination: I ſuſpect, however, that Dr. Prieſtley, in order to reduce the ſtate of the church in general to that of the Unitarians, has rather magnified this matter. But be that as it may, there are *two* circumſtances which render it improper for him to reaſon from this caſe to the other:—Firſt, Whatever bad characters have ranked with other denominations, at leaſt with ours, as to their religious creed, we do not own, or conſider them as "converts;" much leſs do we glory in the ſpread of our principles, when men of that character profeſs to embrace them, as this writer does. † If we ſpeak of converts to our principles, we diſown ſuch

* Iſai. xxviii. 7. 9.

† *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 98—93, 94.

people, and leave them out of the account, as perſons whoſe walk and converſation, whatever be their ſpeculative opinions, diſcover them to be *enemies to the croſs of Chriſt.* But were Socinians to do ſo, it is more than probable that the number of converts of whom they boast would be greatly diminiſhed.—Secondly, Whenever irreligious characters profeſs to imbibe our principles, we do not conſider their ſtate of mind as friendly to them. That which we account truth, is a ſyſtem of holineſs; a ſyſtem, therefore, which men of "no religion" will never cordially embrace. Perſons may indeed embrace a notion about the certainty of the divine decrees, and of the neceſſity of things being as they are to be, whether the proper means be uſed or not; and they may live in the neglect of all means, and of all practical religion; and may reckon themſelves, and be reckoned by ſome others, among the Calviniſts. To ſuch a creed as this, it is allowed, the want of all religion is the beſt preparative: but then it muſt be obſerved, that the creed itſelf is as falſe, as the practice attending it is impure, and as oppoſite to Calviniſm, as it is to ſcripture and common ſenſe. Our opponents, on the contrary, aſcribe many of their converſions to the abſenſe of religion, as their proper cauſe, granting that, "many of thoſe who judge "ſo truly concerning particular tenets in reli-"gion, have attained to that cool unbiaſſed

"temper of mind *in conſequence* of becoming "more indifferent to religion in general, and "to all the modes and doctrines of it." Could this acknowledgment be conſidered as the miſtake of an unguarded moment, it might be overlooked; but it is a *fact*, a fact, which, as Dr. Prieſtley himſelf expreſſes it, "cannot be "denied:"* a fact, therefore, which muſt needs prove a mill-ſtone about the neck of his ſyſtem. That doctrine, be it what it may, to which an indifference to religion in general is friendly, cannot be the goſpel, or any thing pertaining to it, but ſomething very near akin to Infidelity.

If it be objected, that the immoral character of perſons, previous to their embracing a ſet of principles, ought not to be alleged againſt the moral tendency of thoſe principles; becauſe, if it were, chriſtianity itſelf would be diſhonoured by the previous character of many of the primitive chriſtians—It is replied, there are two circumſtances neceſſary to render this objection of any force:—Firſt, The previous character of the convert, however wicked it may have been, muſt have *no influence* on his converſion.—Secondly, This converſion muſt have ſuch an influence on him, that, whatever may have been his paſt character, his future life ſhall be devoted to God. Both theſe circumſtances exiſted in the caſe of

* *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 95.

the primitive chriſtians; and if the ſame could be ſaid of the converts to ſocinianiſm, it is acknowleged that all objections from this quarter ought to give way. But this is not the caſe. Socinian converts are not only allowed, many of them, to be men of *no religion;* but the want of religion, as we have ſeen already, is allowed to have influenced their converſion. Nor is this all; it is allowed, that their converſion to theſe principles has no ſuch influence upon them as to make any material change in their character for the better. This is a fact tacitly admitted by Mr. Belſham, in that he goes about to account for it, by alleging what was their character previous to their converſion. It is true, he talks of this being the caſe, "only for a time," and at length theſe converts are to "have their eyes opened; are to feel "the benign influence of their principles, and "demonſtrate the excellency of their faith by "the ſuperior dignity and worth of their cha-"racter." But theſe, it ſeems, like the, "annihilation of death," and the converſion of Jews and Mahometans by the Socinian doctrine, are things *yet to come.**

* Since the publication of the first edition of these Letters, a report has been circulated, that Dr. Priestley has been *misrepresented* by the quotation in page 56, which also was referred to in the preface, p. i. Dr. P., it has been said, in the place from whence the passage is taken, *was not commending a total indiffer-*

But it will be pleaded, Though many who go over to Socinianism are men of no religion, and

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ence to religion, but the contrary; and his meaning was, not that such a disregard to all religion is a better qualification for discerning truth, than a serious temper of mind, but that it is preferable to that bigoted attachment to a system which some people discover.

That Dr. P.'s leading design was to commend a total indifference to religion was never suggested. I suppose this, on the contrary, was to commend good discipline among the Unitarians, for the purpose of promoting religious zeal. His words are (accounting for the want of zeal among them) "It cannot be denied that many of those who judge so truly concerning particular tenets in religion, have attained to that cool unbiassed "temper of mind, in consequence of becoming more indifferent "to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it. "Though, therefore, they are in a more favourable situation for "distinguishing between truth and falsehood, they are not likely "to acquire a *zeal* for what they conceive to be the truth."

The *leading* design of Dr. P. in this passage, it is allowed, was to recommend good discipline, as friendly to zeal; and as a previous indifference to religion in general was unfavourable to that temper of mind which he wished to inspire, in this view he is to be understood as blaming it. Yet, in an *incidental* manner he as plainly acknowleges it to have been favourable for distinguishing between truth and falsehood, and in this view he must be understood as *commending* it. That he does commend it, though in an incidental way, is manifest from his attributing their judging so truly concerning particular tenets in religion to it; and that not merely as an occasion, but as an adequate cause, producing a good effect; rendering the mind more cool and unbiassed than it was before. To suppose that Dr. P. does not mean to recommend indifference to religion in general, as friendly to *truth* (though unfriendly to *zeal*) is supposing him not to mean what he says.

continue to "lean to a life of diſſipation," yet that is not the caſe *with all:* there are ſome who

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As to the question, Whether Dr. P. means to compare an indifference to religion in general, with a serious temper of mind, or with a ſpirit of bigotry? It cannot be the latter, unleſs he conſider the characters of whom he ſpeaks, as having been formerly bigoted in their attachment to modes and forms. For he is not comparing them with *other people*, but with *themſelves at a former period.* So long as they regarded religion in general, according to his account, they were in a leſs favourable ſituation for diſtinguiſhing between truth and falſhood, than when they came to diſregard it. Dr. P.'s own account of theſe characters ſeems to agree with mere men of the world, rather than with religious bigots. They were perſons, he ſays, who troubled themſelves very little about religion; but who had been led to turn their attention to the diſpute concerning the perſon of Chriſt, and by their natural good ſenſe had decided upon it. To this effect he writes in pages 96, 97, of his *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects.* Now, this is far from anſwering to the character of religious bigots, or of thoſe who at any time have ſuſtained that character.

But, waving this, let us ſuppoſe, that the regard which thoſe characters bore towards religion in general, *was* the regard of bigots. In this caſe, they were a kind of *Phariſees,* attached to modes and forms, which blinded their minds from diſcovering the truth. Afterwards they approached nearer to the *Sadducees,* became more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it. The amount of Dr. P.'s poſition would then be, That the ſpirit of a Sadducee is preferable, with reſpect to diſcerning truth, to that of a Phariſee, poſſeſſing more of a cool unbiaſſed temper of mind. The reply that I ſhould make to this, is, That neither Phariſees nor Sadducees poſſeſs that temper of mind of which Dr. P. ſpeaks but are both *a generation of vipers,* different in ſome reſpects, but equally malignant towards

are exemplary in their lives, men of eminent piety and virtue, and who are distinguished by Dr.

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the true gospel of Christ: and that the humble, the candid, the serious, and the upright enquirers after truth are the only persons likely to find it. And this is the substance of what I advanced in page i. of the preface, which has been charged as a *misrepresentation.* I never suggested that Dr. P. was comparing the characters in question with the serious or the candid; but rather that *let the comparison respect whom it might,* his attributing an unbiassed temper of mind to men in consequence of their becoming indifferent to religion in general, was erroneous; for that he who is not a friend to religion in any mode, is an enemy to it in all modes, and ought not to be complimented as being in a favourable situation for distinguishing between truth and falsehood.

A writer in the *Monthly Review* has laboured to bring Mr. *Belsham* off in the same manner. But instead of affording him any relief, he has betrayed the cause he has espoused, and made Mr. B. reason in a manner unworthy of his abilities. "We apprehend, (says this writer) that Mr. B. does not mean to assert, nor even to intimate, that indifference to religious practice prepared the mind for the admission of *that religious truth which prompts virtuous conduct.*" Mr. B., however, *does* intimate, and even assert, that, "the men who are the most indifferent to the practice of religion, will ever be the first not only to see the absurdity of a popular superstition, but *to embrace a rational system of faith.*" Does the Reviewer mean then to acknowlege that the rational system *does not include that kind of truth which prompts virtuous conduct?* There is no truth in his expressions, but upon this supposition.

But this writer not only informs us what Mr. B. did *not* mean, but what he *did* mean. (One would think the Reviewer of Dr. Williams must have been very intimate with Mr. B.) Mr. Belsham meant, it seems, "That the absurdities of a popular

Prieſtley by the name of "ſerious chriſtians."* To this it is replied:—

"ſuperſtition are *more* apt to ſtrike the minds of thoſe who are "*even* indifferent to religion, *than* of thoſe who are bigoted in "their attachment to particular creeds and rites; and therefore "that the former will be more inclined to allow reaſon to mould "their faith, than the latter."—*Review of Dr. Williams' Anſwer to Mr. Belſham*, for Jan. 1792, page 117.

To be ſure, if a Reviewer may be allowed to add a few ſuch words as *more*, and *than*, and *even*, to Mr. B.'s language he may ſmooth its rough edges, and render it leſs exceptionable; but is it true that this was Mr. B.'s meaning, or that ſuch a meaning would ever have been invented but to ſerve a turn?

If there be any way of coming at an author's meaning, it is by his *words*, and by *the ſcope of his reaſoning*; but neither the one nor the other will warrant this conſtruction. Mr. B.'s *words* are theſe: "The men who are the moſt indifferent to the practice of "religion, will ever be the *firſt* to embrace a rational ſyſtem of "faith." If he intended merely to aſſert, that immoral characters will embrace the truth before bigots, his words are abundantly too ſtrong for his meaning; for though the latter were allowed to be the laſt in embracing truth, it will not follow that the former will be the *firſt*. If the rational ſyſtem were on the ſide of truth, ſurely it might be expected that the ſerious and the upright would be the *firſt* to embrace it. But this is not pretended. *Serious chriſtians*, by the acknowlegement of Mrs. Barbauld, are the *laſt* that come fully into it.

The *ſcope of Mr. Belſham's reaſoning* is equally unfavourable to ſuch a conſtruction as his words are. There is nothing in the objection which he encounters, that admits of ſuch an anſwer. It was not alleged, *That there was a greater proportion of immoral characters than of bigots, among Unitarians;* had

* *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 98.

First, Whatever piety or virtue there may be among Socinian converts, it may be doubted whether piety or virtue led them to embrace that ſcheme, or were much in exerciſe in their reſearches after it.—It has been obſerved by ſome who have been moſt converſant with them, that as they have diſcovered a predilection for thoſe views of things, it has been very common for them to diſcover at the ſame time a light-minded temper, ſpeaking of ſacred things and diſputing about them with the moſt unbecoming levity, and indecent freedom; avoiding all converſation

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this been the charge, the answer put into Mr. B.'s lips might have been in point. But the charge as he himself expresses it, was simply this: "Rational Christians are often represented as "indifferent to practical religion." To suppose that Mr. B. would account for this, by alleging that immoral characters are more likely to embrace the truth than bigots (unless he denominate all bigots who are not Unitarians) is supposing him to have left the objection unanswered. How is it that there should be so great a proportion of immoral characters rather than of *humble, serious, and godly men;* or of what Mr. Belsham calls, "practical believers?" This was the spirit of the objection; and if the above construction of Mr. B.'s words be admitted, it remains unanswered.

Let Dr. Priestley, or Mr. Belsham, or any of their advocates, who have charged the above quotations with *misrepresentation*, come forward, and, if they be able, make good the charge. Till this is done, I shall consider them as fair and just; and as including concessions, which, though possibly made in an unguarded moment, contain a *truth* which must prove a mill-stone about the neck of the Socinian system.

on experimental and devotional ſubjects, and directing their whole diſcourſe to matters of mere ſpeculation. Indeed, piety and virtue are in effect acknowleged to be unfavourable to the embracing of the ſocinian ſcheme: for if "an in-" difference to religion in general be favourable " to the diſtinguiſhing between truth and falſe-" hood;" and if, " thoſe men who are the moſt " indifferent to the practice of religion, will ever " be the *firſt* to embrace the rational ſyſtem," it muſt follow, by the rule of contraries, that piety, virtue, and zeal for religion, are things unfavourable to that ſyſtem, and that pious and virtuous perſons will ever be the *laſt* to embrace it; nay, ſome may think it very doubtful whether they ever embrace it at all. *Serious chriſtians*, according to the account of Mrs. Barbauld, are the moſt difficult ſort of people that ſocinian writers and preachers have to deal with; for though they are ſometimes brought to renounce the calviniſtic doctrines in theory, yet there is a ſort of leaning towards them in their hearts, which their teachers know not how to eradicate. " Theſe doctrines, " (ſhe ſays) it is true, among thinking people are " loſing ground; but there is ſtill apparent in that " claſs called *ſerious chriſtians*, a tenderneſs in ex-" poſing them; a ſort of leaning towards them, " as in walking over a precipice one ſhould lean " to the ſafeſt ſide; an idea that they are, if not

" true, at leaſt good to be believed, and that a " ſalutary error is better than a dangerous truth."*

Secondly, Whatever virtue there may be among ſocinian converts, it may be queſtioned whether the diſtinguiſhing principles of ſocinianiſm have any tendency towards promoting it.—The principles which they hold in common with us; namely, the reſurrection of the dead and a future life, and not those in which they are diſtinguiſhed from us, are confeſſedly the ſprings of their virtue. As to the ſimple humanity of Chriſt, which is one of the diſtinguiſhing principles of ſocinianiſm, Dr. Prieſtley acknowleges that, " The connexion between this ſimple truth, and " a regular chriſtian life is very ſlight.† That, " (ſays the ſame author) which is moſt fa- " vourable to virtue in Chriſtianity, is the expec- " tation of a future ſtate of retribution, ground- " ed on a firm belief of the hiſtorical facts record- " ed in the ſcriptures, especially the miracles, the " death, and reſurrection of Chriſt. The man " who believes theſe things only, and who, to- " gether with this, acknowleges an univerſal pro- " vidence ordering all events, who is perſuaded " that our very hearts are conſtantly open to di- " vine inſpection, ſo that no iniquity, or purpoſe " of it, can eſcape his obſervation, will not be a

* *Remarks on Wakefield's Enquiry on Social Worship.*

† *Discourses on Various Subjects*, p. 97.

" bad man, or a dangerous member of ſociety."* Now theſe are things in which we are all agreed: whatever virtue therefore is aſcribed to them, it is not, ſtrictly ſpeaking, the reſult of ſocinian principles.—If, in addition to this, we were to impute a conſiderable degree of the virtue of ſocinian converts to " the principles in which they " were educated, and the influence to which they " were expoſed in the former part of their lives," we ſhould only ſay of them what Dr. Prieſtley ſays of the virtuous lives of ſome atheiſts; and perhaps we ſhould have as good grounds for ſuch an imputation in the one caſe, as he had in the other.†

Among the various ſocinian converts, Have we ever been uſed to hear of any remarkable change of life or behaviour which a converſion to their peculiar principles effected? I hope there are few calviniſtic congregations in the kingdom, but what could point out examples of perſons among them, who, at the time of their coming over to their doctrinal principles, came over alſo from the courſe of this world, and have ever ſince lived in newneſs of life. Can this be ſaid of the generality of ſocinian congregations? Thoſe who have had the greateſt opportunity of obſerving them, ſay the contrary. Yea, they

* *Let. V. to Mr. Burn.*

† *Let. to a Phil. Unb.* Part I. Pref. p. vi.

add, that the converſion of ſinners to a life of holineſs does not appear to be their aim; that their concern ſeems to be to perſuade thoſe who, in their account, have *too much* religion, that leſs will ſuffice, rather than addreſs themſelves to the irreligious to convince them of their defect. A great part of Dr. Prieſtley's Sermon on the death of Mr. Robinſon is of this tendency. Inſtead of concurring with the mind of God, as expreſſed in his word, *O that my people were wiſe, that they would conſider their latter end!* the preacher goes about to diſſuade his hearers from thinking too much upon that unwelcome ſubject.

You will judge from theſe things, brethren, whether there be any cauſe for boaſting on the part of the ſocinians, in the number of "converts which, they tell us, are continually making to their principles;"* or for diſcouragement on the ſide of the calviniſts, as if what they account the cauſe of God and truth were going faſt to decline.

I am, &c.

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* *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 93.

LETTER V.

ON THE STANDARD OF MORALITY.

Christian Brethren,

YOU have obſerved that Dr. Prieſtley charges the calviniſtic ſyſtem with being unfriendly to morality, "as giving wrong impreſ- "ſions concerning the character and moral go- "vernment of God, and as relaxing the obliga- "tions of virtue." That you may judge of the propriety of this heavy charge, and whether our ſyſtem, or his own, tend moſt to "relax the "obligations of virtue," it ſeems proper to enquire *which of them affords the moſt licentious notions of virtue itſelf.* To ſuppoſe that the ſcheme which pleads for relaxation, both in the precept and in the penalty of the great rule of divine government, ſhould, after all, relax the leaſt, is highly paradoxical. The ſyſtem, be it which it may, that teaches us to lower the ſtandard of obedience, or to make light of the nature of diſobedience, muſt ſurely be the ſyſtem which relaxes the obligations of virtue, and conſequently is of an immoral tendency.

The eternal ſtandard of right and wrong is the moral law, ſummed up in *love to God with all the*

heart, ſoul, mind, and ſtrength, and to our neighbour as ourſelves. This law is *holy, juſt, and good;* holy, as requiring perfect conformity to God; juſt, as being founded in the ſtricteſt equity; and good, as being equally adapted to promote the happineſs of the creature, as the glory of the Creator. Nor have we any notion of the precept of the law being abated, or a jot or tittle of it being given up, in order to ſuit the inclinations of depraved creatures. We do not conceive the law to be more ſtrict than it ought to be, even conſidering our present circumſtances; becauſe we conſider the evil propenſity of the heart, which alone renders us incapaple of perfect obedience, as no excuſe. Neither do we plead for the relaxation of the penalty of the law upon the footing of equity; but inſiſt, that though God, through the mediation of his Son, *doth not mark iniquity, in thoſe that wait on him;* yet he *might* do ſo conſiſtently with juſtice, and that his not doing ſo is of mere grace. I hope theſe ſentiments do not tend to "relax the obligations of virtue." Let us enquire whether the ſame may be ſaid of the ſcheme of our opponents.

It may be thought that in theſe matters, in ſome of them at leaſt, we are agreed. And, indeed, I ſuppoſe few will care to deny in expreſs terms that the moral law, conſiſting of a requiſition to love God with all the heart, and our neighbour as our ſelves, is an eternal ſtandard of right

and wrong. But let it be conſidered, whether ſocinians in their deſcriptions of virtue and vice, do not greatly overlook the former branch of it, and almoſt confine themſelves to thoſe duties which belong to the latter. It has been long obſerved of writers of that ſtamp, that they exalt what are called the *ſocial virtues*, or thoſe virtues which reſpect ſociety, to the neglect, and often at the expence, of others which more immediately reſpect the God that made us. It is a very common thing for ſocinians to make light of religious principle, and to repreſent it as of little importance to our future well-being. Under the ſpecious name of *liberality of ſentiment*, they diſpenſe with that part of the will of God which requires every thought to be in ſubjection to the obedience of Chriſt; and, under the diſguiſe of *candour and charity*, excuſe thoſe who fall under the divine cenſure. The ſcripture ſpeaks of thoſe *who deny the Lord that bought them, bringing upon themſelves ſwift deſtruction*—and of *thoſe who receive not the love of the truth, being given up to believe a lie*, But the minds of ſocinian writers appear to revolt at ideas of this kind; the tenor of their writings is to perſuade mankind that ſentiments may be accepted or rejected without endangering their ſalvation. Infidels have ſometimes complained of Chriſtianity, as a kind of inſult to their dignity, on account of its dealing in *threatenings;* but Dr. Prieſtley, in his *Letters to the Philoſophers and*

Politicians of France, has quite removed this ſtumbling-block out of their way. He accounts for their infidelity in ſuch a way as to acquit them of blame, and enforces chriſtianity upon them by the moſt inoffenſive motives. Not one word is intimated as if there was any danger as to futurity, though they ſhould continue infidels, or even atheiſts, till death. The only ſtring upon which he harps, as I remember, is, that could they but embrace chriſtianity, they would be much happier than they are!

If I entertain degrading notions of the perſon of Chriſt, and if I err from the truth in ſo doing, my error, according to Mr. Lindſey, is *innocent*,* and no one ought to think the worſe of me on that account. But if I happen to be of opinion, that he who rejects the deity and atonement of Chriſt is not a chriſtian, I give great offence. But wherefore? Suppoſe it an error, why ſhould it not be as innocent as the former? and why ought I to be reproached as an illiberal, uncharitable bigot for this, while no one ought to think the worſe of me for the other? Can this be any otherwiſe accounted for than by ſuppoſing that thoſe who reaſon in this manner, are more concerned for their own honour, than for that of Chriſt?

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* *Apol. 4th Ed.* p. 48.

Dr. Prieſtley, it may be noted, makes much lighter of error when ſpeaking on the ſuppoſition of its being found in himſelf, than when he ſuppoſes it to be found in his opponents. He charges Mr. Venn, and others, with "ſtriving "to render thoſe who differ from them in ſome "*ſpeculative points* odious to their fellow-chriſ-"tians;" and elſewhere ſuggeſts, that, "we "ſhall not be judged at the laſt day accord-"ing to our *opinions*, but our *works;* not ac-"cording to what we have *thought of Chriſt*, "but as we have *obeyed his commands:*"* as if it were no diſtinguiſhing property of a good work, that it originate in a good principle; and as if the meaneſt opinion, and the moſt degrading thoughts of Jeſus Chriſt, were conſiſtent with obedience to him. But when he himſelf becomes the accuſer, the caſe is altered, and inſtead of reckoning the ſuppoſed errors of the trinitarians to be merely *ſpeculative points*, and *harmleſs opinions*, they are ſaid to be "idolatrous, and blaſphemous."† But idolatry and blaſphemy will not only be brought into account at the day of judgment, but be very offenſive in the eyes of God.‡ For my part, I am not offended with Dr. Prieſtley, or any other ſocinian, for calling the worſhip that I pay to Chriſt, idolatry and

* *Conſiderations on Differences of Opinion*, § III. *Defence of Unitar. for* 1786, p. 59. *Do. for* 1787, p. 68.

† *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 96. ‡ 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

blaſphemy; becauſe if he be only a man, what they ſay is juſt. If they can acquit themſelves of ſin in *thinking* meanly of Chriſt, they certainly can do the ſame in *ſpeaking* meanly of him; and words ought to correſpond with thoughts. I only think they ſhould not trifle in ſuch a manner as they do with error, when it is ſuppoſed to have place in themſelves, any more than when they charge it upon their opponents.

If Dr. Prieſtley had formed his eſtimate of human virtue by that great ſtandard which requires love to God with all the heart, ſoul, mind, and ſtrength, and to our neighbour as ourſelves; inſtead of repreſenting men by nature as having "more virtue than vice,"* he muſt have acknowleged with the ſcriptures, that *the whole world lieth in wickedneſs—that every thought and imagination of their heart, is only evil continually*—and that *there is none* of them *that doeth good, no not one.*

If Mr. Belſham, in the midſt of that "marvellous light" which he profeſſes lately to have received, had only ſeen the *extent* and *goodneſs* of that law which requires us to love God with *all* our hearts, and our neighbour as ourſelves, in the light in which revelation places it; he could not have trifled, in the manner he

* *Letters to a Phil. Unb.* Part 1. p. 80.

has, with the nature of ſin, calling it "human "frailty," and the ſubjects of it, "the frail "and erring children of men;" nor could he have repreſented God in "marking and puniſh-"ing every inſtance of it, as acting the part of "a mercileſs tyrant."* Mr. Belſham talks of "Unitarians being led to form juſt ſentiments "of the *reaſonableneſs* of the divine law, and "the *equity* of the divine government;" but of what divine law does he ſpeak? Not of that, ſurely, which requires love to God with *all* the heart, ſoul, mind, and ſtrength, and our neighbour as ourſelves; nor of that government which threatens the curſe of God on every one that continueth not in *all things* written in the book of the law to do them; for this allows not of a *ſingle tranſgreſſion*, and puniſhes *every inſtance* of human folly, which Mr. Belſham conſiders as "mercileſs tyranny." He means to inſinuate, I ſuppoſe, that for the law to take cognizance of the very thoughts and intents of the heart, at leaſt of *every inſtance* that occurs, is *unreaſonable;* and that to inflict puniſhment accordingly is *inequitable.* He conceives therefore of a law, it ſeems, that is more accommodated to the *propenſities*, or, as he would call them, *frailties* of the erring children of men; a law that may *not* cut off all hopes of a ſinners ac-

* *Serm.* 33—35.

ceptance with God by the deeds of it, ſo as to render an *atoning* mediator abſolutely neceſſary, and this he calls *reaſonable;* and of a government that will *not* bring every ſecret thing into judgment, nor make men accountable for *every idle word*, and this he calls *equitable*. And this is the "marvellous light" of ſocinianiſm; this this is the doctrine that is to promote a holy life; this is the ſcheme of thoſe who are continually branding the calviniſtic ſyſtem with antinomianiſm.

If the moral law require love to God with *all* the heart, and ſoul, and mind, and ſtrength, and to our neighbour as ourſelves; it cannot allow the *leaſt degree* of alienation of the heart from God, or of the *ſmalleſt inſtance* of malevolence to man. And if it be what the ſcripture ſays it is, *holy, juſt*, and *good;* then, though it require *all* the heart, and ſoul, and mind, and ſtrength, it cannot be too ſtrict; and if it be not too ſtrict, it cannot be unworthy of God, nor can it be "mercileſs tyranny," to abide by it. On the contrary, it muſt be worthy of God to ſay of a good law, *Not a jot or tittle of it ſhall fail.*

Dr. M'Gill, in his *Practical Eſſay on the Death of Jeſus Chriſt*, maintains that "The "Supreme Lawgiver determined from the be- "ginning to mitigate the rigour of the law, to

" make allowances for human error and imper-
" fection, and to accept of repentance and ſin-
" cere obedience, inſtead of ſinleſs perfection."*
But if this were the determination of the law-
giver, it was either conſidered as a matter of
right, or of *undeſerved favour*. If the former,
why was not the law ſo framed as to correſpond
with the determination of the lawgiver? How
was it, eſpecially, that a new edition of it ſhould
be publiſhed from Mount Sinai, and that with-
out any ſuch allowances? Or if this could be
accounted for, how was it that Jeſus Chriſt
ſhould declare that *not a jot or tittle of it ſhould
fail*, and make it his buſineſs to condemn the
conduct of the ſcribes and phariſees, who had
lowered its demands, and ſoftened its penalties,
with a view to " make allowance for human er-
" ror and imperfection?" It could anſwer no
good end, one ſhould think, to load the divine
precepts with threatenings of cruelty. A law ſo
loaded would not bear to be put in execution:
and we have been taught by Dr. Prieſtley, in
what he has written on the Teſt-Act, to conſider
" the continuance of a law which will not bear
" to be put in execution, as needleſs and op-
" preſſive, and as what ought to be abrogated."†
If repentance and ſincere obedience be all that
ought to be required of men in their preſent

* *Page* 252. † *Fam. Let. Letter VI.*

ſtate, then the law ought to be ſo framed, and allowance to be made by it for error and imperfection. But then it would follow, that where men *do* repent, and *are* ſincere, there are no errors and imperfections to be allowed for. Errors and imperfections imply a law from which they are deviations; but if we be under no law, except one that allows for deviations, then we are as holy as we ought to be, and need no forgiveneſs.

If, on the other hand, it be allowed that the relaxation of the law of innocence is not what we have any *right* to expect, but that God has granted us this indulgence out of *pure grace;* I would then aſk the reaſon, why theſe gentlemen are continually exclaiming againſt our principles as making the Almighty a tyrant, and his law unreaſonable, and cruel? Is it tyrannical, unreaſonable, or cruel, for God to withhold what we have no right to expect?*

* The intelligent reader, who is acquainted with the different ſentiments that are embraced in the religious world, will eaſily perceive the agreement between the ſocinian and arminian ſyſtems on this ſubject. By their exclamations on the *injuſtice* of God as repreſented by the calviniſtic ſyſtem, they both render that a *debt*, which God in the whole tenor of his word declares to be of *grace*. Neither of them will admit the equity of the divine law, and that man is thereby righteouſly condemned to eternal puniſhment, antecedently to the grace of the goſpel; or if they admit it in words, they will be ever contradicting it by the tenor of their reaſonings.

Dr. Prieſtley defines *juſtice*, as being, "Such "a degree of ſeverity, or pains and penalties ſo "inflicted, as will produce the beſt effect with "reſpect both to thoſe who are expoſed to them, "and to others who are under the ſame govern-"ment: or, in other words, that degree of evil "which is calculated to produce the greateſt "degree of good; and if the puniſhment ex-"ceed this meaſure, if in any inſtance it be an "*unneceſſary*, or *uſeleſs* ſuffering, it is always "cenſured as *cruelty*, and is not even called "juſtice, but real injuſtice." To this he adds, "If in any particular caſe the ſtrict execution "of the law would do more harm than good, it "is univerſally agreed that the puniſhment ought "to be remitted."* With an obſervation or two on the above paſſage, I ſhall cloſe this letter.

Firſt, That all puniſhments are deſigned for the good of the whole, and leſs, or corrective puniſhments for the good of the offender, is admitted. Every inſtance of divine puniſhment will be not only proportioned to the laws of equity, but adapted to promote the good of the univerſe at large. God never inflicts puniſhment for the ſake of puniſhing. He has no ſuch pleaſure in the death of a ſinner as to put him to pain, whatever may be his deſert, without ſome great and

* *Lett. to a Phil. Unb.* Part I. p. 100, 101.

good end to be anſwered by it: but that, in the caſe of the finally impenitent, this end ſhould neceſſarily include the good of the offender, is as contrary to reaſon, as it is to ſcripture. It does not appear from any thing we know of governments either human or divine, that the good of the offender is neceſſarily, and in all caſes, the end of puniſhment. When a murderer is executed, it is neceſſary for the good of the community; but it would ſound very ſtrange to ſay it was neceſſary for his own good; and that unleſs *his* good were promoted by it, as well as that of the community, it muſt be an act of cruelty!

Secondly, That there are caſes in human governments, in which it is right and neceſſary to relax in the execution of the ſentence of the law, is alſo admitted. But this ariſes from the imperfection of human laws. Laws are general rules for the conduct of a community, with ſuitable puniſhments annexed to the breach of them. But no general rules can be made by men, that will apply to every particular caſe. If legiſlators were wiſe and good men, and could foreſee every particular caſe that would ariſe in the different ſtages of ſociety, they would ſo frame their laws as that they need not be relaxed when thoſe caſes ſhould occur. But God is wiſe and good; and, previous to his giving us the law which requires us to love him with *all* our hearts, and our neighbour as ourſelves, knew every change that could

poſſibly ariſe, and every caſe that could occur. The queſtion therefore is not, "If in any parti-"cular caſe the ſtrict execution of the law would "do more harm than good, whether it ought not "to be remitted;" but, whether an omniſcient, wiſe, and good law-giver, can be ſuppoſed to have made a law, the penalty of which, if put in execution, would do more harm than good? Would a Being of ſuch a character make a law, the penalty of which, according to ſtrict equity, requires to be remitted; a law which he could not in juſtice abide by, and that not only in a few ſingular caſes, but in the caſe of every individual, in every age, to whom it is given?

It is poſſible theſe conſiderations may ſuffice to ſhow that the divine law is *not* relaxed; but, be that as it may, the queſtion at iſſue is, what is the *moral tendency* of ſuppoſing that it is? To relax a bad law would indeed have a good effect, and to abrogate it would have a better; but not ſo reſpecting a good one. If the divine law be what the ſcripture ſays it is, *holy*, *juſt*, and *good*; to relax it in the precept, or even to mitigate the penalty, without ſome expedient to ſecure its honours, muſt be ſubverſive of good order; and the ſcheme which pleads for ſuch relaxation muſt be unfavourable to holineſs, juſtice, and goodneſs.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR TENDENCY TO PROMOTE MORALITY IN GENERAL.

Christian Brethren,

WHAT has been advanced in the laſt Letter on the ſtandard of morality, may ſerve to fix the meaning of the term in this. The term *morality*, you know, is ſometimes uſed to expreſs thoſe duties which ſubſiſt between men and men, and in this acceptation ſtands diſtinguiſhed from *religion;* but I mean to include under it the whole of what is contained in the moral law.

Nothing is more common than for the adverſaries of the calviniſtic ſyſtem to charge it with immorality; nay, as if this were ſelf-evident, they ſeem to think themſelves excuſed from advancing any thing likeſober evidence to ſupport the charge. Virulence, rant, and extravagance, are the weapons with which we are not unfrequently combated in this warfare. "I challenge the whole "body and being of moral evil itſelf," ſays a writer of the preſent day,* "to invent, or inſpire, or "whiſper any thing blacker or more wicked: "yea, if ſin itſelf had all the wit, the tongues, "and pens of all men and angels, to all eternity,

* *Lewclyn's Tracts*, p. 292.

" I defy the whole to ſay any thing of God
" worſe than this. O ſin, thou haſt ſpent and
" emptied thyſelf in the doctrine of John Cal-
" vin! And here I rejoice that I have heard
" the utmoſt that malevolence itſelf ſhall ever
" be able to ſay againſt infinite benignity! I
" was myſelf brought up and tutored in it, and
" being delivered, and brought to ſee the evil
" and danger, am bound by my obligations to
" God, angels, and men, to warn my fellow-
" ſinners; I therefore here, before God, and
" the whole univerſe, recal and condemn every
" word I have ſpoken in favour of it. I thus
" renounce the doctrine as the rancour of devils;
" a doctrine, the preaching of which is babbling
" and mocking, its prayers blaſphemy, and
" whoſe praiſes are the horrible yellings of ſin
" and hell. And this I do becauſe I know and
" believe that God is love; and therefore his
" decrees, works, and ways, are alſo love, and
" cannot be otherwiſe." It were ill-ſpent time to attempt an anſwer to ſuch unfounded calumny as this, which certainly partakes much more of the ravings of inſanity, than of the words of truth and ſoberneſs: yet this, according to the *Monthly Review*, is, " The true colouring of the doctrine of Calviniſm."* Had any thing like

* *Review for July* 1792, *p.* 266.

this been written by a Calviniſt againſt Socinianiſm, the Reviewers would have been the firſt to have exclaimed againſt calviniſtic illiberality.

This gentleman profeſſes to have been a calviniſt, and ſo does Dr. Prieſtley. The calviniſm of the latter, however, ſeems to have left an impreſſion upon his mind very different from the above. "Whether it be owing to my calviniſtical education, (ſays he) or my conſidering "the principles of calviniſm as generally favourable to that leading virtue, *devotion*, or "to their being ſomething akin to the doctrine "of neceſſity, I cannot but acknowledge, that, "notwithſtanding what I have occaſionally written againſt that ſyſtem, and which I am far "from wiſhing to retract, I feel myſelf diſpoſed "to look upon calviniſts with a kind of *reſpect*, "and could never join in the contempt and "inſult with which I have often heard them "treated in converſation."†

But Dr. Prieſtley, I may be told, whatever good opinion he may have of the piety and virtue of calviniſts, has a very ill opinion of calviniſm; and this, in a certain degree, is true. Dr. Prieſtley, however, would not ſay that, "The preach-"ing of that ſyſtem was babbling and mocking, "its prayers blaſphemy, or its praiſes the hor-

† *The Doctrine of Philoſophical Neceſſity illuſtrated, p.* 163.

"rible yellings of ſin and hell:" on the contrary, he acknowleges "its principles to be generally "favourable to that leading virtue, *devotion.*"

I confeſs Dr. Prieſtley has advanced ſome heavy accuſations on the immoral tendency of calviniſm; accuſations which ſeem ſcarcely conſiſtent with the candid conceſſions juſt now quoted, and theſe I ſhall now proceed to examine.—"I do "not ſee, (ſays he) what motive a calviniſt can "have to give any attention to his moral con-"duct. So long as he is unregenerate, all his "thoughts, words, and actions, are neceſſarily "ſinful, and in the act of *regeneration* he is alto-"gether paſſive. On this account the moſt con-"ſiſtent calviniſts never addreſs any exhorta-"tions to ſinners, conſidering them as *dead in* "*treſpaſſes and ſins;* and therefore that there "would be as much ſenſe and propriety in ſpeak-"ing to the dead as to them. On the other "hand, if a man be in the happy number of the "*elect*, he is ſure that God will, ſome time or "other, and at the moſt proper time (for which "the laſt moment of his life is not too late) "work upon him his miraculous work of *ſaving* "*and ſanctifying grace.* Though he ſhould be "ever ſo wicked immediately before this divine "and *effectual calling*, it makes nothing againſt "him. Nay, ſome think that this being a more

" ſignal diſplay of the wonders of divine grace, " it is rather the more probable that God will " take this opportunity to diſplay it. If any " ſyſtem of ſpeculative principles can operate as " an axe at the root of all virtue, and goodneſs, " it is this."* On this unfavourable account of calviniſm, I would offer the following obſervations.

Firſt, If Calviniſm be an axe at the root of virtue and goodneſs, it is only ſo with reſpect to thoſe of the " unregenerate;" which certainly does not include all the virtue and goodneſs in the world. As to others, Dr. Prieſtley acknowledges, as we have ſeen already, that our principles are " generally favourable to *devotion;*" and devotion, if it be what he denominates it, " a *leading* virtue," will doubtleſs be *followed* with other virtues correſpondent with it. He acknowledges alſo, " There are many (among " the calviniſts) whoſe hearts and lives are in all " reſpects truly chriſtian, and whoſe chriſtian " tempers are really promoted *by their own views* " *of their ſyſtem.*"† How is it then, that Dr. Prieſtley " cannot ſee what motive a calviniſt " can have to give any attention to his moral " conduct;" and why does he repreſent calviniſm " as an axe at the root of *all* virtue and good- " neſs?" By all virtue and goodneſs he can only

* *Doc. of Neceſſity*, p. 154. † Ibid, pp. 163, 164.

mean the virtue and goodneſs of wicked men. Indeed this appears plainly to have been his meaning: for, after acknowledging that calviniſm has ſomething in it favourable to "an habitual and animated devotion," he adds, "But where "a diſpoſition to vice has pre-occupied the mind, "I am very well ſatisfied, and but too many facts "might be alledged in proof of it, that the doc- "trines of calviniſm have been actually fatal to "the *remains of virtue*, and have driven men "into the moſt deſperate and abandoned courſe "of wickedneſs; whereas the doctrine of neceſ- "ſity, properly underſtood, cannot poſſibly have "any ſuch effect, but the contrary."* Now ſuppoſe all this were true, it can never juſtify Dr. Prieſtley in the uſe of ſuch unlimited terms as thoſe before mentioned. Nor is it any diſgrace to the calviniſtic ſyſtem, that, men, whoſe minds are pre-occupied with vice, ſhould miſunderſtand and abuſe it. The pureſt liquor, if put into a muſty caſk, will become unpalatable. It is no more than is ſaid of ſome who profeſſed to embrace chriſtianity in the times of the apoſtles, that they *turned the grace of God into laſciviouſneſs.* Is it any wonder that the wicked will do wickedly; or that they will extract poiſon from that which, rightly underſtood, is the food of the righteous? It is enough if our ſentiments, like

* *Doc. of Neceſſity*, p. 162.

God's words, do good to the upright. Wiſdom does not expect to be *juſtified,* but *of her children.* The ſcriptures themſelves make no pretence of having been uſeful to thoſe who have ſtill lived in ſin; but allow the goſpel to be *a ſavour of death unto death in them that periſh.* The doctrine of neceſſity is as liable to produce this effect as any of the doctrines of calviniſm. It is true, as Dr. Prieſtley obſerves, "It cannot do ſo, if it be properly underſtood;" but this is allowing that it may do ſo, if it be miſunderſtood; and we have as good reaſon for aſcribing the want of a proper underſtanding of the ſubject, to thoſe who abuſe predeſtination and other calviniſtic doctrines, as he has for aſcribing it to thoſe who abuſe the doctrine of neceſſity. Dr. Prieſtley ſpeaks of *the remains of virtue* where a diſpoſition to vice has pre-occupied the mind; and of the calviniſtic ſyſtem being as an axe at the root of theſe remains: but ſome people will queſtion, whether virtue of ſuch a deſcription have any root belonging to it, ſo as to require an axe to cut it up; and whether it be not owing to this circumſtance that ſuch characters, like the ſtony-ground hearers, in time of temptation fall away.

Secondly, The Calviniſtic ſyſtem is miſrepreſented by Dr. Prieſtley, even as to its influence on the *unregenerate.*—In the paſſage before quoted, he repreſents thoſe perſons, "who are "of the happy number of the elect, as being *ſure*

"that God will ſome time or other work upon "them his work of ſanctifying grace." But how are they to come at this aſſurance? Not by any thing contained in the calviniſtic ſyſtem. All the writers in that ſcheme have conſtantly inſiſted, That no man has any warrant to conclude himſelf of the happy number of the elect, till the work of ſanctifying grace is actually wrought. With what colour of truth, or ingenuouſneſs, then, could Dr. Prieſtley repreſent our ſyſtem as affording a ground of aſſurance, previous to that event? This is not a matter of ſmall account in the preſent controverſy; it is the point on which the immoral tendency of the doctrine wholly dedends. As to the *certainty* of any man's being ſanctified and ſaved at ſome future time, this can have no ill influence upon him, while it exiſts merely in the divine mind. If it have any ſuch influence, it muſt be owing to his *knowledge* of it at a time when, his heart being ſet on evil, he would be diſpoſed to abuſe it; but this, as we have ſeen, upon the calviniſtic ſyſtem, is utterly impoſſible; becauſe nothing ſhort of a ſanctified temper of mind affords any juſt grounds to draw the favourable concluſion. Dr. Prieſtley has alſo repreſented it as a part of the calviniſtic ſyſtem, or, however, "as the opinion of ſome," that the more wicked a man is, previous to God's work of ſanctifying grace upon him, the more probable it is that he will ſome time be ſanctified

and ſaved. But though it be allowed, that God frequently takes occaſion from the degree of human wickedneſs to magnify his grace in delivering from it; yet it is no part of the calviniſtic ſyſtem, that the former affords any grounds of probability to expect the latter; and whoever they be that Dr. Prieſtley alludes to as entertaining ſuch an opinion, I am inclined to think they are not among the reſpectable writers of the party, and probably not among thoſe who have written at all.

Thirdly, Let it be conſidered, Whether Dr. Prieſtley's own views of Philoſophical Neceſſity do not amount to the ſame thing as thoſe which he alledges to the diſcredit of Calviniſm; or, if he will inſiſt upon the contrary, whether he muſt not contradict himſelf, and maintain a ſyſtem, which, by his own confeſſion, is leſs friendly to piety and humility, than that which he oppoſes. —A ſtate of *unregeneracy* is conſidered by Calviniſts as being the ſame thing which Dr. Prieſtley deſcribes as, "the ſtate of a perſon who ſins "with *a full conſent of will*, and who *diſpoſed as he* "*is*, is under an impoſſibility of acting otherwiſe; "but who," as he juſtly maintains, "is never-"theleſs accountable, even though that conſent "be produced by the efficacy and unconquerable "influence of motives. It is only, (continues "he) where the neceſſity of ſinning ariſes from "*ſome other cauſe, than a man's own diſpoſition of*

" *mind*, that we ever ſay there is an impropriety " in puniſhing a man for his conduct. If the " impoſſibility of acting well has ariſen from *a* " *bad diſpoſition*, or *habit*, its having been im- " poſſible, *with that diſpoſition* or *habit*, to act vir- " tuouſly, is never any reaſon for our forbearing " puniſhment; becauſe we know that puniſh- " ment is proper to correct that diſpoſition and " that habit."* Now if it be conſiſtent to puniſh a man for neceſſary evil, as Dr. Prieſtley abundantly maintains, Why ſhould it be inconſiſtent to exhort, perſuade, reaſon, or expoſtulate with him; and why does he call thoſe Calviniſts " the moſt conſiſtent," who avoid ſuch addreſſes to their auditors? If " the thoughts, words, and actions of " unregenerate men, being neceſſarily ſinful," be a juſt reaſon why they ſhould not have exhortations addreſſed to them; the whole doctrine of neceſſity muſt be inconſiſtent with the uſe of means; than which nothing can be more contrary to truth, and to Dr. Prieſtley's own views of things.

As to our being *paſſive* in regeneration, if Dr. Prieſtley would only admit that any one character could be found that is ſo depraved as to be deſtitute of all true virtue, the ſame thing would follow from his own Neceſſarian principles. Ac-

* *Doc. of Neceſſity*, pp. 63—65.

cording to thoſe principles, every man who is under the dominion of a vicious habit of mind, will continue to chuſe vice, till ſuch time as that habit be changed, and that by ſome influence without himſelf. "If (ſays he) I make any par-"ticular choice to-day, I ſhould have done the "ſame yeſterday, and ſhould do the ſame to-"morrow, provided there be no change in the "ſtate of my mind reſpecting the object of the "choice." * Now can any perſon in ſuch a ſtate of mind be ſuppoſed to be active in the changing of it; for ſuch activity muſt imply an inclination to have it changed, which is a contradiction, as it ſuppoſes him at the ſame time under the dominion of evil, and inclined to goodneſs?

But poſſibly, Dr. Prieſtley will not admit that any one character can be found who is utterly deſtitute of true virtue. Be it ſo; he muſt admit that in ſome characters vice has an *habitual aſcendency:* but the habitual aſcendency of vice as certainly determines the choice, as even a total depravity. A decided majority in parliament carry every meaſure with as much certainty as if there were no minority. Wherever vice is predominant (and in no other caſe is regeneration needed) the party muſt neceſſarily be *paſſive* in the firſt change of his mind in favour of virtue.

* Page 7.

But there are ſeaſons in the life of the moſt vicious men, in which their evil propenſities are at a lower ebb than uſual; in which conſcience is alive, and thoughts of a ſerious nature arreſt their attention. At theſe favourable moments it may be thought that virtue has the advantage of its oppoſite, and that this is the time for a perſon to become active in effecting a change upon his own mind. Without enquiring whether there be any real virtue in all this; it is ſufficient to obſerve, that if we allow the whole of what is pleaded for, the objection deſtroys itſelf. For it ſuppoſes, that in order to a voluntary activity in favour of virtue, the mind muſt firſt be virtuouſly diſpoſed, and that by ſomething in which it was *paſſive;* which is giving up the point in diſpute.

Dr. Prieſtley often repreſents "a change of "diſpoſition and character as being effected only "by a change of conduct, and that of long con-"tinuance."* But whatever influence a courſe of virtuous actions may have upon the diſpoſition, and however it may tend to eſtabliſh us in the habit of doing good, *all* goodneſs of diſpoſition cannot ariſe from this quarter. There muſt have been a diſpoſition to good, and one too that was ſufficiently ſtrong to outweigh its oppoſite, ere a courſe of virtuous actions could be commenced;

* *Doc. of Neceſſity*, p. 156.

for virtuous action is nothing but the effect, or expreſſion, of virtuous diſpoſition. To ſay that this previous diſpoſition was alſo produced by other previous actions, is only carrying the matter a little farther out of ſight; for unleſs it can be proved that virtuous action may exiſt prior to, and without all virtuous diſpoſition, let the one be carried back as far as it may, it muſt ſtill have been preceded by the other; and in obtaining the preceding diſpoſition, the ſoul muſt neceſſarily have been *paſſive.**

Dr. Prieſtley labours hard to overthrow the doctrine of *immediate divine agency*, and contends that all divine influence upon the human mind is through the medium of ſecond cauſes, or according to the eſtabliſhed laws of nature. "If moral impreſſions were made upon men's "minds by an immediate divine agency, to "what end (he aſks) has been the whole appa-"ratus of *revealed religion?*"† This in effect

* Since the publication of the ſecond edition of theſe letters, it has been ſuggeſted by a friend, that there is no neceſſity for confining theſe obſervations to the caſe of a man totally depraved, or of one under the habitual aſcendency of vice: for that, according to Dr. Prieſtley's Neceſſarian principles, all volitions are the effects of motives: therefore every man, in every volition, as he is the ſubject of the influence of motive operating as a cauſe, *is paſſive*; equally ſo, according to the Calviniſtic ſyſtem, as he is ſuppoſed to be in regeneration.

† *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 221.

is saying, That if there be laws for such an operation on the human mind, every kind of influence upon it must be through the medium of those laws; and that if it be otherwise, there is no need of the use of means. But might he not as well alledge, That if there be laws by which the planets move, every kind of influence upon them must have been through the medium of those laws; and deny that the Divine Being immediately, and prior to the operation of the laws of nature, put them all in motion? Might he not as well ask, If an immediate influence could be exercised in setting the material system in motion, of what use are all the laws of nature by which it is kept in motion? Whatever laws attend the movements of the material system, the first creation of it is allowed to have been by an immediate exertion of divine power. God said, *Let there be light, and there was light;* and why should not the second creation be the same? I say *the second creation;* for the change upon the sinner's heart is represented as nothing less in the divine word, and the very manner of its being effected, is expressed in language which evidently alludes to the first creation—*God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* Not only scripture, but reason itself teaches the necessity for such an imme-

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diate divine interpoſition in the changing of a ſinner's heart. If a piece of machinery (ſuppoſe the whole material ſyſtem) were once in a ſtate of diſorder, the mere exerciſe of thoſe laws by which it was ordained to move, would never bring it into order again; but on the contrary, would drive it on farther and farther to everlaſting confuſion.

As to *election*, Dr. Prieſtley cannot conſiſtently maintain his ſcheme of Neceſſity without admitting it. If, as he abundantly maintains, God is the author of every good diſpoſition in the human heart;* and if, as he alſo in the ſame ſection maintains, God, in all that he does, purſues one plan or ſyſtem previouſly concerted; it muſt follow, that wherever good diſpoſitions are produced, and men are finally ſaved, it is altogether in conſequence of the appointment of God, which, as to the preſent argument, is the ſame thing as the calviniſtic doctrine of election.

So plain a conſequence is this from Dr. Prieſtley's neceſſarian principles, that he himſelf, when writing his Treatiſe on that ſubject, could not forbear to draw it. "Our Saviour (he ſays) "ſeems to have conſidered the rejection of the "goſpel by thoſe who boaſted of their wiſdom,†

* *Doc. of Necessity*, § xi.

† Query, Were not these the *rational religionists* of that age?

" and the reception of it by the more deſpiſed
" part of mankind, as being the conſequence of
" the expreſs appointment of God. *At that*
" *time Jeſus anſwered and ſaid, I thank thee, O*
" *Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou*
" *haſt hid theſe things from the wiſe and prudent,*
" *and haſt revealed them unto babes; even ſo, Fa-*
" *ther, for ſo it ſeemeth good in thy ſight.*" To the ſame purpoſe, in the next page but one, he obſerves, that God is conſidered as " the ſove-
" reign diſpoſer, both of goſpel privileges here,
" and future happineſs hereafter, as appears in
" ſuch paſſages as 2 Theſſ. ii. 13. *God hath*
" *from the beginning choſen you to ſalvation,*
" *through ſanctification of the Spirit, and belief*
" *of the truth.*"*

If there be any difference between that election which is involved in Dr. Prieſtley's own ſcheme, and that of the calviniſts, it muſt conſiſt, not in the original appointment, or in the certainty of the event, but in the intermediate cauſes or reaſons which induced the Deity to fix things in the manner that he has done; and it is doubtful whether even this can be admitted. It is true, Dr. Prieſtley, by his exclamations againſt *unconditional election*,† would ſeem to maintain that where God hath appointed a ſinner to obtain ſalva-

* Page 140—142.

† *Conſequences on Diff. in Rel. Opin.* § III.

tion, it is on account of his foreſeen virtue; and he may plead that ſuch an election is favourable to virtue, as making it the ground, or procuring cauſe of eternal felicity; while an election that is altogether unconditional, muſt be directly the reverſe. But let it be conſidered, in the Firſt place, Whether ſuch a view of election as this does not claſh with the whole tenor of ſcripture; which teaches us, that we are *ſaved and called with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to the divine purpoſe and grace given us in Chriſt Jeſus before the world began—Not of works, leſt any man ſhould boaſt—At this preſent time alſo there is a remnant according to the election of grace—And if by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwiſe grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace; otherwiſe work is no more work.** Secondly, Let it be conſidered whether ſuch an election will conſiſt with Dr. Prieſtley's own ſcheme of Neceſſity. This ſcheme ſuppoſes that all virtue, as well as every thing elſe, is neceſſary. Now whence aroſe the neceſſity of it? It was not ſelf-originated, nor accidental; it muſt have been eſtabliſhed by the

* See also those ſcriptures which represent election as the *cauſe* of faith and holiness; particularly Ephes. i. 3, 4. John vi. 37. Rom. viii. 22, 30. Acts xiii. 48. 1 Pet. i. 1. Rom. ix. 15, 16. But if it be the *cauſe*, it cannot be the *effect* of them.

Deity. And then it will follow, that if God elect any man, on account of his foreſeen virtue, he muſt have elected him on account of that which he had determined to give him; but this, as to the origin of things, amounts to the ſame thing as unconditional election.

As to men's taking liberty to ſin, from the conſideration of their being among the number of the elect; that, as we have ſeen already, is what no man can do with ſafety or conſiſtency, ſeeing he can have no evidence on that ſubject but what muſt ariſe from a contrary ſpirit and conduct. But ſuppoſe it were otherwiſe, an objection of this ſort would come with an ill grace from Dr. Prieſtley, who encourages all mankind not to fear, ſince God has made them all for unlimited ultimate happineſs, and (whatever be their conduct in the preſent life) to ultimate unlimited happineſs they will all doubtleſs come.*

Upon the whole, Let thoſe who are inured to cloſe thinking, judge whether Dr. Prieſtley's own views of philoſophical neceſſity do not include the leading principles of calviniſm? But ſhould he inſiſt upon the contrary, then let it be conſidered, whether he muſt not contradict himſelf, and maintain a ſyſtem which, by his own confeſſion, is leſs friendly to piety and humility than

* *Doc. of Neceſſity.* pp. 128, 129.

that which he oppoſes. "The eſſential difference "(he ſays) between the two ſchemes is this: The "neceſſarian believes his own diſpoſitions and "actions are the neceſſary and ſole means of his "preſent and future happineſs; ſo that, in the "moſt proper ſenſe of the words, it depends en-"tirely on himſelf whether he be virtuous or "vicious, happy or miſerable. The calviniſt "maintains, on the other hand, that ſo long as "a man is unregenerate, all his thoughts, words, "and actions, are neceſſarily ſinful, and in the "act of regeneration he is altogether paſſive."* We have ſeen already that on the ſcheme of Dr. Prieſtley, as well as that of the calviniſts, men in the firſt turning of the bias of their hearts, muſt be paſſive. But allow it to be otherwiſe, allow what the Doctor elſewhere teaches, that "A change of diſpoſition is the *effect*, and not "the *cauſe* of a change of conduct;"† and that it depends entirely on ourſelves whether we will thus change our conduct, and by theſe means our diſpoſitions, and ſo be happy for ever; all this, if others of his obſervations be juſt, inſtead of promoting piety and virtue, will have a contrary tendency. In the ſame performance Dr. Prieſtley acknowledges, that, "Thoſe who from a prin-"ciple of religion aſcribe more to God and leſs "to man than other perſons, are men of the

* *Doc. of Neceſſity*, pp. 152—154. † *Ibid.* p. 156.

"greateſt elevation of piety."* But if ſo, it will follow, that the eſſential difference between the neceſſarianiſm of ſocinians, and that of calviniſts, (ſeeing it conſiſts in this, that the one makes it depend entirely upon a man's ſelf, whether he be virtuous or vicious, happy or miſerable, and the other upon God) is in favour of the latter. Thoſe who conſider men as depending entirely upon God for virtue and happineſs, aſcribe more to God and leſs to man than the other; and ſo, according to Dr. Prieſtley, are, "men of the greateſt elevation of piety." They, on the other hand, who ſuppoſe men to be dependent entirely upon *themſelves* for theſe things, muſt conſequently have leſs of piety, and more of "heathen ſtoiciſm;" which, as the ſame writer, in the ſame treatiſe obſerves, "allows men to pray for *external things*, but admoniſhes them that, as for "virtue, it is our own, and muſt ariſe from within ourſelves, if we have it at all."†

But let us come to *facts*. If, as Dr. Prieſtley ſays, there be "ſomething in our ſyſtem, "which, if carried to its juſt conſequences, "would lead us to the moſt abandoned wickedneſs;" it might be expected, one ſhould think, that a looſe, diſſipated, and abandoned life, would be a more general thing among the

* *Doc. of Neceſſity*, p. 107. † *Page* 67.

calviniſts, than among their opponents. This ſeems to be a conſequence of which he feels the force; and therefore diſcovers an inclination to make it good. In anſwer to the queſtion, "Why thoſe perſons who hold theſe opinions "are not abandoned to all wickedneſs, when "they evidently lay them under ſo little re-"ſtraint?" he anſwers, "This *is* often the caſe "of thoſe who purſue theſe principles to their "juſt and fatal conſequences"—adding, "For "it is eaſy to prove that the antinomian is the "only conſiſtent *abſolute predeſtinarian.*"* That there are perſons who profeſs the doctrine of abſolute predeſtination, and who, from that conſideration, may indulge themſelves in the greateſt enormities, is admitted. Dr. Prieſtley, however, allows, that theſe are "only ſuch perſons "whoſe minds are previouſly depraved;" that is, wicked men, who *turn the grace of God into laſciviouſneſs.* Nor are ſuch examples "often" to be ſeen among us; and where they are, it is commonly in ſuch people who make no ſerious pretence to perſonal religion, but who have juſt ſo much of predeſtination in their heads, as to ſuppoſe that all things will be as they are appointed to be, and therefore that it is in vain to ſtrive; juſt ſo much as to look at the end, and overlook the means; which is as wide of Calviniſm

* *Conſid. on Differ. of Opin.* § III.

as it is of ſocinianiſm. This may be the *abſolute* predeſtination which Dr. Prieſtley means; namely, a predeſtination to eternal life, let our conduct be ever ſo impure, and a predeſtination to eternal death, let it be ever ſo holy; and if ſo, it is granted that the antinomian is the only conſiſtent believer in it: but then it might with equal truth be added, that he is the only perſon who believes in it at all. The calviniſtic doctrine of predeſtination ſuppoſes, that holineſs of heart and life are as much the object of divine appointment as future happineſs; and that this connexion can never be broken. To prove that the antinomian is the only conſiſtent believer in ſuch a predeſtination as this, may not be ſo *eaſy* a taſk as barely to aſſert it. I cannot imagine it would be very eaſy, eſpecially for Dr. Prieſtley, ſeeing he acknowledges, that "the idea of every thing being "predeſtinated from all eternity is no objection "to *prayer*, becauſe all means are appointed as "well as ends; and therefore if prayer be in it-"ſelf a proper means, the end to be obtained by "it, we may be aſſured, will not be had without "*this*, any more than without any other means, "or neceſſary previous circumſtances."* Dr. Prieſtley may allege that this is not *abſolute* predeſtination: but it is as abſolute as ours, which makes equal proviſion for faith and holineſs,

* *Lett. to a Phil. Unb. Part.* I. p. 111.

and for every mean of ſalvation, as this does for prayer.

Will Dr. Prieſtley undertake to prove that *a looſe, diſſipated, and abandoned life, is a more general thing among the calviniſts; than among their opponents?* I am perſuaded he will not. He knows that the calviniſts in general are far from being a diſſipated, or an abandoned people, and goes about to account for it; and that in a way that *ſhall reflect no honour upon their principles.* "Our "moral conduct (he obſerves) is not left at the "mercy of our opinions; and the regard to vir- "tue that is kept up by thoſe who maintain the "doctrines above-mentioned, is owing to the in- "fluence of other principles implanted in our "nature."* Admitting this to be true, yet one would think the worſt principles will, *upon the whole*, be productive of the worſt practices. They whoſe innate principles of virtue are all employed in counteracting the influence of a pernicious ſyſtem, cannot be expected to form ſuch amiable characters, as where thoſe principles are not only left at liberty to operate, but are aided by a good ſyſtem. It might, therefore, be expected, I ſay again, if our principles be what our opponents ſay they are, that a looſe, diſſipated, and abandoned life, would be a more general thing among us than among them.

* *Conſid. on Differ. of Opin.* § III.

I may be told, that the ſame thing, if put to us, would be found equally difficult; or that, notwithſtanding we contend for the ſuperior influence of the calviniſtic ſyſtem to that of Socinus, yet we ſhould find it difficult to prove, that a looſe, diſſipated, and abandoned life, is a more general thing among ſocinians, than it is among calviniſts. And I allow that I am not ſufficiently acquainted with the bulk of the people of that denomination to hazard an aſſertion of this nature. But if what is allowed by their own writers (who ought to know them) may be admitted as evidence, ſuch an aſſertion might nevertheleſs be ſupported. "Rational chriſtians are often repreſented (ſays "Mr. Belſham) as indifferent to practical reli-"gion." Nor does he deny the juſtice of this repreſentation, but admits, though with apparent reluctance, that "there has been ſome plauſible "ground for the accuſation;" and goes about to account for it, as we have ſeen in Letter IV. in ſuch a way, however, *as may reflect no diſhonour upon their principles.*"* The ſame thing is acknowledged by Dr. Prieſtley, who allows, that "A *great number* of the Unitarians of the pre-"ſent age are only men of good ſenſe, and with-"out much practical religion:" and, that "there

* *Serm.* p. 32.

" is a greater apparent conformity to the world " in them, than is obſervable in others."* Yet he alſo goes about to account for theſe things as Mr. Belſham does, in ſuch a way *as may reflect no diſhonour on their principles.* It is rather extraordinary, that when facts are introduced in favour of the virtue of the general body of the calviniſts, they are not denied, but accounted for in ſuch a way that their principles muſt ſhare none of the honour; and when facts of an oppoſite kind are introduced in proof of the want of virtue in unitarians, they alſo are not denied, but accounted for in ſuch a way that their principles ſhall have none of the diſhonour. Calviniſm, it ſeems, muſt be immoral, though calviniſts be virtuous; and ſocinianiſm muſt be amiable, though ſocinians be vicious. I ſhall not enquire whether theſe very oppoſite methods of accounting for facts be fair or candid. On this the reader will form his own judgment: it is enough for me that the facts themſelves are allowed.

If we look back to paſt ages (to ſay nothing of thoſe who lived in the earlieſt periods of chriſtianity, becauſe I would refer to none but ſuch as are allowed to have believed the doctrine in queſtion) I think it cannot be fairly denied, that the great body of holy men, who have maintained the true worſhip of God (if there was any true

* *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 100.

worſhip of God maintained) during the Romiſh apoſtaſy; and who, many of them, ſacrificed their earthly all for his name, have lived and died in the belief of the deity and atonement of Chriſt. Our opponents often ſpeak of theſe doctrines being embraced by the apoſtate church of Rome; but they ſay little of thoſe, who during the long period of her uſurpation, bore teſtimony for God. The *Waldenſes*, who inhabited the vallies of Piedmont, and the *Albigenſes*, who were afterwards ſcattered almoſt all over Europe, are allowed, I believe, on all hands, to have preſerved the true religion in thoſe darkeſt of times: and, it is thought by ſome expoſitors, that theſe are the people who are ſpoken of in the twelfth chapter of the Revelation, under the repreſentation of *a woman, to whom was given two wings of a great eagle, that ſhe might fly into the wilderneſs—and there be nouriſhed for a time, from the face of the ſerpent.* It was here that true religion was maintained, and ſealed by the blood of thouſands from age to age, when all the reſt of the chriſtian world were *wondering after the beaſt.* And as to the doctrines which they held, they were much the ſame as ours. Among the adverſaries to the church of Rome, it is true, there might be men of different opinions. Arius, and others, may be ſuppoſed to have had their followers in thoſe ages. But the body of the people called *Waldenſes*, are not to be reckoned as ſuch; on the contrary, the

principles which they profeſſed were for ſubſtance the ſame with thoſe embraced afterwards by the reformed churches; as is abundantly manifeſt by ſeveral of their catechiſms and confeſſions of faith, which have been tranſmitted to our times.

Mr. Lindſey, in his *Apology*, has given a kind of hiſtory of thoſe who have oppoſed the doctrine of the trinity; but they make a poor figure during the above long and dark period, in which, if ever, a teſtimony for God was needed. He ſpeaks of "churches and ſects, as well as "individuals of that deſcription, in the XIIth century;" and there might be ſuch. But can he produce any evidence of their having ſo much virtue as to make any conſiderable *ſacrifices* for God? Whatever were their number, according to Mr. Lindſey's own account, from that time till the Reformation (a period of three or four hundred years, and during which the *Waldenſes* and the *Wickliffites* were ſacrificing every thing for the preſervation of a good conſcience) they "were driven into corners, and ſilence."* That is, there is no teſtimony upon record which they bore, or any account of their having ſo much virtue in them as to oppoſe, at the expenſe of either life, liberty, or property, the prevailing religion of the times.

* Chapter I. p. 34.

Mr. Lindſey ſpeaks of the piety of "the famous *Abelard;*" but ſurely he muſt have been wretchedly driven for want of that important article, or he would not have aſcribed it to a man, who, as a late writer obſerves, "could "with equal facility explain Ezekiel's prophe- "cies, and compoſe amorous ſonnets for Heloiſe; "and was equally free to unfold the doctrine of "the trinity, and ruin the peace of a family, by "debauching his patron's niece."* The ſame writer, in the *Appendix to his Farewel Sermon to the Congregation in Eſſex-ſtreet*, lately publiſhed, holds up the piety of *Servetus*, by giving us one of his prayers addreſſed to Jeſus Chriſt; in which he expreſſes his full perſuaſion that he was under a *divine impulſe* to write againſt his proper divinity. Surely, if ſocinian piety had not been very ſcarce, Mr. Lindſey would not have been under the neceſſity of exhibiting the effuſions of idolatry and enthuſiaſm, as examples of it.

Religion will be allowed to have ſome influence in the forming of a *national* character: eſpecially that of the common people, among whom, if any where, it generally prevails. Now if we look at thoſe nations where calviniſm has been moſt prevalent, it will be found, I believe, that they have not been diſtinguiſhed by their immorality, but the reverſe. *Geneva*, the *Seven United-States*, *Scotland*, and *North America* (with

* Mr. Robinſon's *Plea for the Divinity of Chriſt.*

the two laſt of which we may be rather better acquainted than with the reſt) might be alledged as inſtances of this aſſertion. With reſpect to *Scotland*, though other ſentiments are ſaid to have lately gained ground with many of the clergy; yet calviniſm is known to be generally prevalent among the ſerious part of the people. And as to their national character you ſeldom know an intelligent Engliſhman to have viſited that country, without being ſtruck with the peculiar ſobriety, and religious behaviour of the inhabitants. As to *America*, though, ſtrictly ſpeaking, they may be ſaid to have no national religion (a happy circumſtance in their favour) yet perhaps there is no one nation in the world where calviniſm has more generally prevailed. The great body of the firſt ſettlers were calviniſts; and the far greater part of religious people among them, though of different denominations as to other matters, continue ſuch to this day. And, as to the moral effects which their religious principles have produced, they are granted on all hands to be conſiderable. They are a people, as the *Monthly Reviewers* have acknowledged, "whoſe love of "liberty is attempered with that of order and de"cency, and accompanied with the virtues of "integrity, moderation, and ſobriety. They "know the neceſſity of regard to religion and "virtue, both in principle and practice."*

* *Monthly Rev. from May to Aug.* 1793, p. 502.

In each of theſe countries, it is true, as in all others, there are great numbers of irreligious individuals; perhaps a majority: but they have a greater proportion of religious characters than moſt other nations can boaſt; and the influence which theſe characters have upon the reſt, is as that of a portion of leaven which leaveneth the whole lump.

The members of the church of England, it may be taken for granted, were generally calviniſts, as to their doctrinal ſentiments, at, and for ſome time after, the Reformation. Since that time thoſe ſentiments have been growing out of repute, and ſocinianiſm is ſuppoſed, among other principles, to have prevailed conſiderably among the members of that community. Dr. Prieſtley, however, is often very ſanguine in eſtimating the great numbers of unitarians among them. Now let it be conſidered, whether this change of principle has in any degree been ſerviceable to the intereſts of piety or virtue. On the contrary, did not a ſerious walking with God, and a rigid attention to morals, begin to die away from the time that the doctrines contained in the *thirty nine articles* began to be diſregarded?† And now when ſocinianiſm is ſuppoſed to have made a

† The ſame ſort of people who held calviniſtic doctrines, were at the ſame time ſo ſevere in their morals, that *Laud* found it neceſſary, it ſeems, to publiſh *The Book of Sports*, in order to counteract their influence on the nation at large.

greater progreſs than ever it did before, is there not a greater degree of *perjury*, and more *diſſipation* of manners, than at almoſt any period ſince the Reformation?

I am not inſenſible that it is the opinion of Dr. Prieſtley, and of ſome others, that men grow better, that the world advances conſiderably in moral improvement; nay, Mr. Belſham ſeems to favour an idea, that "in proceſs of time, the earth may "revert to its original paradiſiacal ſtate—and "death itſelf be annihilated." This however will hardly be thought to prove any thing, except that enthuſiaſm is not confined to calviniſts. And as to men growing better, whatever may be the moral improvement of the world in general, Dr. Prieſtley ſomewhere acknowledges, that this is far from being the caſe with the church of England, eſpecially ſince the times of biſhop Burnet.

With reſpect to the *diſſenters*, were there ever men of holier lives than the generality of the *puritans* and *nonconformiſts* of the laſt two centuries? Can any thing, equal to their piety and devotedneſs to God, be found among the generality of the ſocinians of their time, or of any time? In ſufferings, in faſtings, in prayers, in a firm adherence to their principles, in a cloſe walk with God in their families, and in a ſeries of unremitted labours for the good of mankind, they ſpent their lives.

But *faſtings* and *prayers*, perhaps, may not be admitted as excellences in their character. It is poſſible they may be treated with ridicule. Nothing leſs than this is attempted by Dr. Prieſtley in his Fifth Letter to Mr. Burn. "I could wiſh "(ſays he) to quiet your fears on your account. "For the many ſleepleſs nights which your ap- "prehenſions muſt neceſſarily have cauſed you, "accompanied of courſe with much earneſt "*prayer* and *faſting*, muſt in time affect your "health." Candour out of the queſtion, Is this *piety?*—It is ſaid to be no uncommon thing for perſons who have been uſed to pray extempore, when they have turned ſocinians, to leave off that practice, and betake themſelves to a written form of their own compoſition. This is formal enough, and will be thought by many to afford but ſlender evidence of their devotional ſpirit; but yet one would have ſuppoſed they would not have dared to ridicule it in others, however deſtitute of it they might be themſelves.

Dr. Prieſtley allows that unitarians are peculiarly wanting in *zeal* for religion.* That this conceſſion is juſt, appears not only from the indifference of great numbers of them in private life, but from the conduct of many of their preachers. It has been obſerved, that, when young miniſters have become ſocinians, they

* *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, pp. 94, 95.

have frequently given up the miniſtry, and become ſchool-maſters, or any thing they could. Some, who have been poſſeſſed of fortunes, have become mere private gentlemen. Several ſuch inſtances have occurred both among diſſenters and churchmen. If they had true zeal for God and religion, why is it that they are ſo indifferent about preaching what they account the truth?

Dr. Prieſtley farther allows, that calviniſts have "leſs *apparent* conformity to the world; "and that they *ſeem* to have more of a real "principle of religion than ſocinians." But then he thinks the other have the moſt candour and benevolence; "ſo, as upon the whole, to "approach neareſt to the proper temper of "chriſtianity." He "*hopes* alſo they have "more of a real principle of religion than they "*ſeem* to have."* As to candour and benevolence, theſe will be conſidered in another Letter. At preſent it is ſufficient to obſerve, that Dr. Prieſtley, like Mr. Beltham, on a change of character in his converts, is obliged to have recourſe to *hope*, and to judge of things contrary to what they *appear* in the lives of men, in order to ſupport the religious character of his party.

That a large proportion of ſerious people are to be found among calviniſts, Dr. Prieſtley

* *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, pp. 100, 101.

will not deny; but Mrs. *Barbauld* goes farther. She acknowledges, in effect, that the ſerioufneſs which is to be found among ſocinians themſelves, is accompanied by a kind of ſecret attachment to our principles; an attachment which their preachers and writers, it ſeems, have hitherto laboured in vain to eradicate. "Theſe "doctrines (ſhe ſays) it is true, among thinking "people are loſing ground; but there is ſtill "apparent in that claſs called *ſerious chriſtians*, "a tenderneſs in expoſing them; a ſort of lean-"ing towards them, as in walking over a pre-"cipice one ſhould lean to the ſafeſt ſide: an "idea that they are, if not true, at leaſt good "to be believed; and that a ſalutary error is "better than a dangerous truth."* By the "claſs called ſerious chriſtians," Mrs. Barbauld cannot mean profeſſed calviniſts; for they have no notion of leaning towards any ſyſtem as a ſyſtem of ſalutary error, but conſider that to which they are attached as being the truth. She muſt therefore intend to deſcribe the ſerious part of the people of her own profeſſion. We are much obliged to Mrs. Barbauld for this important piece of information. We might not ſo readily have known without it, that the hearts

* *Remarks on Wakefield's Enquiry.*

and conſciences of the *ſerious part* of ſocinians revolt at their own principles; and that, though they have rejected what they eſteem the great doctrines of the goſpel in theory, yet they have an inward leaning towards them as the only ſafe ground on which to reſt their hopes. According to this account it ſhould ſeem, that *ſerious chriſtians* are known by their predilection for calviniſtic doctrines; and that thoſe "*thinking people* among whom theſe doctrines are loſing ground," are not of that claſs or deſcription, being diſtinguiſhed from them. Well, it does not ſurpriſe us to hear, that "thoſe men who are the "moſt indifferent to practical religion are the "*firſt*, and ſerious chriſtians the *laſt*, to em- "brace the rational ſyſtem," becauſe it is no more than might be expected. If there be any thing ſurpriſing in the affair, it is, that thoſe who make theſe acknowledgements ſhould yet boaſt of their principles, on account of their moral tendency.

I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR TENDENCY TO PROMOTE LOVE TO GOD.

Christian Brethren,

OUR opponents, as you have doubtleſs obſerved, are as bold in their aſſertions, as they are liberal in their accuſations. Dr. Prieſtley not only aſſerts that the calviniſtic ſyſtem is "unfavourable to genuine piety, but to *every* "*branch of vital practical religion.*"* We have conſidered, in the foregoing Letter, what relates to morality and piety in general: in the following Letters we ſhall deſcend to particulars, and enquire, under the ſeveral ſpecific virtues of chriſtianity, which of the ſyſtems in queſtion is the moſt unfavourable to them.

I begin with LOVE. The love of God and our neighbour, not only contains the ſum of the moral law, but the ſpirit of true religion: it muſt therefore afford a ſtrong preſumption for, or againſt a ſyſtem, as it is found to promote or diminiſh theſe cardinal virtues of the chriſtian character. On both theſe topics we are principally engaged on the defenſive, as our views of

* *Conſider. on Differ. of Opin.* § III.

things ſtand charged with being unfavourable to the love of both God and man. "There is "ſomething in your ſyſtem of chriſtianity," ſays Dr. Prieſtley in his *Letters to Mr. Burn*, "that debaſes the pure ſpirit of it, and does not "conſiſt with either the perfect veneration of "the divine character, which is the foundation "of true devotion to God; or perfect candour "and benevolence to man." A very ſerious charge, and which, could it be ſubſtantiated, would doubtleſs afford a ſtrong preſumption, if not more than preſumption, againſt us. But let the ſubject be examined. This Letter will be devoted to the firſt part of this heavy charge, and the following one to the laſt.

As to the queſtion, Whether we feel a veneration for the divine character? I ſhould think we ourſelves muſt be the beſt judges. All that Dr. Prieſtley can know of the matter is, that *he* could not feel a perfect veneration for a Being of ſuch a character as we ſuppoſe the Almighty to ſuſtain. That, however, may be true, and yet nothing reſult from it unfavourable to our principles. It is not impoſſible that Dr. Prieſtley ſhould be of ſuch a temper of mind as incapacitates him for admiring, venerating, or loving God in his true character; and hence he may be led to think, that all who entertain ſuch and ſuch ideas of God, muſt be void of that perfect

veneration for him which he ſuppoſes himſelf to feel. The true character of God, as revealed in the ſcriptures, muſt be taken into the account, in determining whether our love to God be genuine or not. We may clothe the Divine Being with ſuch attributes, and ſuch only, as will ſuit our depraved taſte; and then it will be no difficult thing to fall down and worſhip him: but this is not the love of God, but of an idol of our own creating.

The principal objections to the calviniſtic ſyſtem, under this head, are taken from the four following topics: The *atonement;* the *vindictive* character of God; the *glory* of God, rather than the happineſs of creatures, being his laſt end in creation; and the *worſhip* paid to Jeſus Chriſt.

Firſt, the doctrine of *atonement* as held by the calviniſts, is often repreſented by Dr. Prieſtley as detracting from the goodneſs of God, and as inconſiſtent with his *natural placability.*—He ſeems always to conſider this doctrine as originating in the want of love, or at leaſt, of a ſufficient degree of love; as though God could not find in his heart to ſhow mercy without a price being päid for it. "Even the elect, (ſays he) accord-
" ing to their ſyſtem, cannot be ſaved till the
" utmoſt effects of the divine wrath have been

" ſuffered for them by an innocent perſon."* Mr. *Jardine* alſo, by the title which he has given to his late publication, calling it, *The unpurchaſed love of God, in the redemption of the world by Jeſus Chriſt;* ſuggeſts the ſame idea. When our opponents wiſh to make good the charge of our aſcribing a natural implacability to the Divine Being, it is common for them either to deſcribe our ſentiments in their own language; or, if they deign to quote authorities, it is not from the ſober diſcuſſions of proſaic writers, but from the figurative language of poetry. Mr. *Belſham*, deſcribes " the formidable chimera of our imagi-" nation, to which, (he ſays) we have annexed " the name of *God the Father*, as a mercileſs ty-" rant."† They conceive of " God the Father," ſays Mr. *Lindſey*, " always with dread, as a Be-" ing of ſevere, unrelenting juſtice, revenge-" ful, and inexorable, without full ſatisfaction " made to him for the breach of his laws. God " the Son, on the other hand, is looked upon " as made up of all compaſſion and goodneſs, " interpoſing to ſave men from the Father's " wrath, and ſubjecting himſelf to the extremeſt " ſufferings on that account." For proof of this, we are referred to *the poetry of Dr. Watts!* in which he ſpeaks of *the rich drops of Jeſus'*

* *On Differ. of Opin.* § III.

† *Sermons on the Importance of Truth*, p. 33—35.

'blood, that calm'd his frowning face; that ſprinkled o'er the burning throne, and turn'd the wrath to grace—of *the infant Deity, the bleeding God,* and *of heaven appeaſed with flowing blood.**

On this ſubject, a calviniſt might without preſumption adopt the language of our Lord to the jews, *I honour my Father, and ye do diſhonour me.* Nothing can well be a greater miſrepreſentation of our ſentiments than this which is conſtantly given. Theſe writers cannot be ignorant, that calviniſts diſavow conſidering the death of Chriſt as a *cauſe* of divine love or goodneſs. On the contrary, they always maintain, that divine love is the cauſe, the firſt cauſe of our ſalvation, and of the death of Chriſt to that end. They would not ſcruple to allow that God had love enough in his heart to ſave ſinners without the death of his Son, had it been conſiſtent with righteouſneſs; but that, as receiving them to favour without ſome public expreſſion of diſpleaſure againſt their ſin, would have been a diſhonour to his government, and have afforded an encouragement for others to follow their example; *the love of God wrought in a way of righteouſneſs:* firſt giving his only-begotten Son to become a ſacrifice, and then pouring forth all the fulneſs

* *Apology* (4th Ed.) p. 97. and *Appendix to his Farewell Sermon, at Eſſex-ſtreet*, p. 52.

of his heart through that appointed medium. The incapacity of God to ſhow mercy without an atonement, is no other than that of a righteous governor; who, whatever good-will he may bear to an offender, cannot admit the thought of paſſing by the offence, without ſome public expreſſion of his diſpleaſure againſt it; that, while mercy triumphs, it may not be at the expenſe of law and equity, and of the general good.

So far as I underſtand it, this is the light in which calviniſts conſider the ſubject. Now judge, brethren, Whether this view of things repreſent the divine Being as *naturally implacable?* Whether the gift of Chriſt to die for us be not the ſtrongeſt expreſſion of the contrary? and, Whether this, or the ſyſtem which it oppoſes, "give wrong impreſſions concerning the charac-"ter and moral government of God? Nay, I appeal to your own hearts, Whether that way of ſaving ſinners through an atonement, in which mercy and truth meet together, righteouſneſs and peace embrace each other; in which God is *juſt, and the juſtifier of him that believeth in Jeſus;* do not endear his name to you more than any other repreſentation of him that was ever preſented to your minds? Were it poſſible for your ſouls to be ſaved in any other way, for the divine law to be relaxed, or its penalty remitted

without reſpect to an atonement; would there not be a virtual reflection caſt upon the divine character? Would it not appear as if God had enacted a law that was ſo rigorous as to require a repeal, and iſſued threatenings which he was obliged to retract? Or, at leaſt, that he had formed a ſyſtem of government without conſidering the circumſtances in which his ſubjects would be involved; a ſyſtem, "the ſtrict exe-"cution of which would do more harm than "good;" nay, as if the Almighty, on this account, were aſhamed to maintain it, and yet had not virtue enough to acknowledge the remiſſion to be an act of *juſtice*, but muſt all along call it by the name of *grace?* Would not the thought of ſuch a reflection deſtroy the bliſs of heaven, and ſtamp ſuch an impreſſion of *meanneſs* upon that character whom you are taught to adore, as would almoſt incapacitate you for revering or loving him?

It is farther objected, that, according to the calviniſtic ſyſtem, God is *a vindictive Being*, and that as ſuch we cannot love him.—It is ſaid, that we "repreſent God in ſuch a light, that "no earthly parent could imitate him with-"out ſuſtaining a character ſhocking to man-"kind." That there is a mixture of the vindictive in the calviniſtic ſyſtem, is allowed: but let it be cloſely conſidered, whether this be any

diſparagement to it? Nay, rather, whether it be not neceſſary to its perfection? The iſſue in this caſe entirely depends upon the queſtion, Whether vindictive juſtice be in itſelf amiable? If it be, it cannot render any ſyſtem unamiable. "We are neither amuſed nor edified, (ſays a "writer in the *Monthly Review*) by the coruſ-"cations of damnation. Nor can we by any "means bring ourſelves to think, with the late "Mr. Edwards, that the vindictive juſtice of God "is a glorious attribute."* This however may be very true, and vindictive juſtice be a glorious attribute, notwithſtanding.

I believe it is very common for people, when they ſpeak of vindictive puniſhment, to mean that kind of puniſhment which is inflicted from a wrathful diſpoſition, or a diſpoſition to puniſh for the pleaſure of puniſhing. Now, if this be the meaning of our opponents, we have no diſpute with them. We do not ſuppoſe the Almighty to puniſh ſinners for the ſake of putting them to pain. Neither ſcripture, nor calviniſm, conveys any ſuch idea. Vindictive puniſhment, as it is here defended, ſtands oppoſed to that puniſhment which is merely *corrective*: the one is exerciſed for the good of the party; the other not ſo, but for the good of the community.

* *Rev. of Edwards's XXXIII Sermons*, for Mar. 1791.

Thoſe who deny this laſt to be amiable in God, muſt found their denial either on ſcripture-teſtimony, or on the nature and fitneſs of things. As to the *former*, the ſcriptures will hardly be ſuppoſed to repreſent God as an unamiable Being; if therefore they teach that vindictive juſtice is an unamiable attribute, it muſt be maintained that they never aſcribe that attribute to God. But with what colour of evidence can this be alleged? Surely, not from ſuch language as the following: *The Lord thy God is a conſuming fire, even a jealous God—Our God is a conſuming fire—God is jealous, and the Lord* REVENGETH; *the Lord* REVENGETH, *and is furious; the Lord will take* VENGEANCE *on his adverſaries, and he reſerveth wrath for his enemies—Who can ſtand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceneſs of his anger?—His fury is poured out like fire—O Lord God, to whom* VENGEANCE *belongeth: O God, to whom* VENGEANCE *belongeth, ſhew thyſelf!—He that ſheweth no mercy ſhall have judgment without mercy—He that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will ſhew them no favour—For we know him that hath ſaid,* VENGEANCE *belongeth unto me, I will recompence, ſaith the Lord—It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God—I lift up my hand to heaven, and ſay, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering ſword, and mine hand take*

hold on judgment, I will render VENGEANCE *to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me—The angels which kept not their firſt eſtate, he hath reſerved in everlaſting chains, under darkneſs, unto the judgment of the great day—Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them are ſet forth for an example, ſuffering the vengeance of eternal fire—The Lord Jeſus ſhall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking* VENGEANCE *on them that know not God, and that obey not the goſpel of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.**

As to *the nature and fitneſs of things*, we cannot draw any concluſion from thence againſt the lovelineſs of vindictive juſtice, as a *divine* attribute, unleſs the thing itſelf can be proved to be unlovely. But this is contrary to the common ſenſe and practice of mankind. There is no nation or people under heaven, but what conſider it in various caſes as both neceſſary and lovely. It is true, they would deſpiſe and abhor a magiſtrate, who ſhould puniſh beyond deſert; or who ſhould avail himſelf of the laws of his country to gratify his own caprice, or his private revenge. This, however, is not vindictive juſtice, but manifeſt *injuſtice*. No conſiderate citizen, who values the

* Deut. iv. 24. Heb. xii. 29. Nahum i. 2, 6. Pſal. xciv. 1. James ii. 13. Iſai. xxvii. 11. Heb. x. 30, 31. Deut. xxxii. 40, 41. Jude 6, 7. 2 Thes. i. 8.

public weal, could blame a magiſtrate for putting the penal laws of his country ſo far in execution, as ſhould be neceſſary for the true honour of good government, the ſupport of good order, and the terror of wicked men. When the inhabitants of Gibeah requeſted, that the Levite might be brought out to them that they might *know him;* and on their requeſt not being granted, abuſed and murdered his companion; all Iſrael, as one man, not only condemned the action, but called upon the Benjamites to deliver up the criminals to juſtice. Had the Benjamites complied with their requeſt, and had thoſe ſons of Belial been put to death, not for their own good, but for the good of the community, where had been the unlovelineſs of the procedure? On the contrary, ſuch a conduct muſt have recommended itſelf to the heart of every friend of righteouſneſs in the univerſe, as well as have prevented the ſhocking effuſion of blood which followed their refuſal. Now, if vindictive juſtice may be glorious in a human government, there is no reaſon to be drawn from *the nature and fitneſs of things*, why it would not be the ſame in the divine adminiſtration.

But the idea on which our opponents love principally to dwell, is that of a *father*. Hence the charge, that we "repreſent God in ſuch "a light that no earthly parent could imitate

" him, without ſuſtaining a character ſhocking " to mankind." This objection comes with an ill grace from Dr. Prieſtley; who teaches, that " God is the author of ſin; and may do evil, " provided it be with a view that good may " come."* Is not this repreſenting God in ſuch a light, that no one could imitate him without ſuſtaining a character ſhocking to mankind? Whether Dr. Prieſtley's notions on this ſubject be true, or not, it is true that God's ways are ſo much above ours, that it is unjuſt in many caſes to meaſure his conduct to a rebellious world, by that of a father to his children.

In this matter, however, God is imitable. We have ſeen already that a good magiſtrate, who may juſtly be called the *father* of his people, ought not to be under the influence of blind affection, ſo as in any caſe to ſhew mercy at the expenſe of the public good. Nor is this all: There are caſes in which a parent has been obliged, in benevolence to his family, and from a concern for the general good, to give up a ſtubborn and rebellious ſon, to bring him forth with his own hands to the elders of his city, and there with his own lips bear witneſs againſt him; ſuch witneſs too as would ſubject him not to a mere ſalutary correction, but to be ſtoned to death by the men of his city. We know ſuch a law was

* *On Neceſſity*, p. 117—121.

made in Iſrael;* and as a late writer obſerved upon it, ſuch a law "was wiſe and good;"† it was calculated to enforce in parents an early and careful education of their children; and if, in any inſtance, it was executed, it was *that all Iſrael might hear and fear!* And how do we know but that it may be conſiſtent with the good of the whole ſyſtem, yea, neceſſary to it, that ſome of the rebellious ſons of men, ſhould, in company with apoſtate angels, be made *examples* of divine vengeance; that they ſhould ſtand, like Lot's wife, as *pillars of ſalt*, or as everlaſting monuments of God's diſpleaſure againſt ſin; and that while their ſmoke riſeth up for ever and ever, all the intelligent univerſe ſhould *hear and fear, and do no more ſo wickedly!* Indeed, we muſt not only know, that this *may* be the caſe, but if we pay any regard to the authority of ſcripture, that it *is* ſo. If words have any meaning, this is the idea given us of the *Angels who kept not their firſt eſtate;* and of the inhabitants of *Sodom and Gomorrha;* who are ſaid to be *ſet forth* FOR AN EXAMPLE, *ſuffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*‡

It belongs to the character of an all-perfect Being, who is the moral governor of the uni-

* Deut. xxi. 18—21.

† Mr. Robinſon, in his *Sermon to the Young People at Willingham.*

‡ Jude 6. 7.

verſe, to promote the good of the whole; but there may be caſes, as in human governments, wherein the general good may be inconſiſtent with the happineſs of particular parts. The caſe of robbers, of murderers, or of traitors, whoſe lives are ſacrificed for the good of ſociety, that the example of terror afforded by their death may counteract the example of immorality exhibited by their life, is no detraction from the benevolence of a government, but rather eſſential to it.

But how, after all, can we *love* ſuch a tremendous Being? I anſwer, a capacity to reſent an injury is not always conſidered as a blemiſh even in a *private character:* if it be governed by juſtice and aimed at the correction of evil, it is generally allowed to be commendable. We do not eſteem the favour of a man if we conſider him as incapable, on any occaſion, of reſentment. We ſhould call him an eaſy ſoul, who is kind, merely becauſe he has not ſenſe enough to feel an inſult. But ſhall we allow it right and fit for a puny mortal thus far to know his own worth, and aſſert it; and at the ſame time deny it to the great Supreme, and plead for his being inſulted with impunity?

God, however, in the puniſhment of ſin, is not to be conſidered as acting in a merely *private capacity*, but as the univerſal moral governor; not as ſeparate from the great ſyſtem

of Being, but as connected with it; or as head and guardian of it. Now in this relation, vindictive juſtice is not only conſiſtent with the lovelineſs of his character, but eſſential to it. Capacity and inclination to puniſh a diſorder in a ſtate, are never thought to render an earthly prince leſs lovely in the eyes of his loyal and faithful ſubjects, but more ſo. That temper of mind, on the contrary, which ſhould induce him to connive at rebellion, however it might go by the name of benevolence and mercy, would be accounted by all the friends of good government, injuſtice to the public, and thoſe who in ſuch caſes ſide with the diſaffected, and plead their cauſe, are generally ſuppoſed to be tainted with diſaffection themſelves.

A third objection is taken from the conſideration of *the glory of God*, rather than the happineſs of creatures, being his laſt end in creation.—"Thoſe who aſſume to themſelves the diſtinguiſhing title of orthodox, (ſays Dr. Prieſtley) conſider the ſupreme Being as having created all things *for his glory*, and by no means for the general happineſs of all his creatures."* If by the general happineſs of *all* his creatures, Dr. Prieſt-

* *On Differ. of Opin.* § III.

ley means, the general good of the univerſe, nothing can be more unfair than this repreſentation. Thoſe who are called orthodox never conſider the glory of God as being at variance with the happineſs of creation in general, nor with that of any part of it, except thoſe who have revolted from the divine government: nor, if we regard the intervention of a mediator, with theirs, unleſs they prove finally impenitent, or, as Dr. Prieſtley calls them, "wilful and obſtinate tranſgreſſors." The glory of God *conſiſts*, with reference to the preſent caſe, in doing that which is beſt upon the whole. But if, by the general happineſs of *all* his creatures, he means to include the happineſs of thoſe angels who kept not their firſt eſtate, and of thoſe men who die impenitent; it is acknowledged, that what is called the orthodox ſyſtem does by no means conſider this as an end in creation, either ſupreme or ſubordinate. To ſuppoſe that the happineſs of *all* creatures, whatever might be their future conduct, was God's ultimate end in creation, (unleſs we could imagine him to be diſappointed with reſpect to the grand end he had in view) is to ſuppoſe what is contrary to *fact*. All creatures we are certain are not happy in this world; and, if any regard is to be paid to revelation, all will not be happy in the next.

If it be alleged, that a portion of misery is neceſſary in order to reliſh happineſs; that therefore the miſeries of the preſent life, upon the whole, are bleſſings: and that the miſeries threatened in the life to come may be of the ſame nature, deſigned as a purgation, by means of which, ſinners will at length eſcape the ſecond death—It is replied, All the miſeries of this world are not repreſented as bleſſings to the parties, nor even all the good things of it. The drowning of Pharaoh, for inſtance, is never deſcribed as a bleſſing to him; and God declared that he had *curſed the bleſſings* of the wicked prieſts, in the days of the prophet Malachi. *All things*, we are aſſured, *work together for good;* but this is confined *to thoſe who love God, and are the called according to his purpoſe.* As to the life to come, if the miſeries belonging to that ſtate be merely temporary and purgative, there muſt be all along a mixture of love and mercy in them; whereas the language of ſcripture is, *He that hath ſhewed no mercy, ſhall have judgment* WITHOUT MERCY—*The wine of the wrath of God will be poured out* WITHOUT MIXTURE. Nay, ſuch miſeries muſt not only contain a *mixture* of love and mercy, but they themſelves muſt be the effects and expreſſions of love; and then it will follow, that the foregoing language of limitation and

diſtinction (which is found indeed throughout the Bible) is of no account; and that bleſſings and curſes are the ſame things. Dr. Prieſtley himſelf ſpeaks of "the laws of God as being "guarded with awful ſanctions;" and ſays, "that God will inflexibly puniſh all wilful and "obſtinate tranſgreſſors."* But how can that be called an *awful* ſanction which only ſubjects a man to ſuch miſery as is neceſſary for his good? How, at leaſt, can that be accounted *inflexible* puniſhment in which the divine Being all along aims at the ſinner's happineſs? We might as well call the operation of a ſurgeon in amputating a mortified limb, in order to ſave the patient's life, by the name of inflexible puniſhment, as thoſe miſeries which are intended for the good of the ſinner. If that be their end, they are, ſtrictly ſpeaking, bleſſings, though bleſſings in diguiſe: and in that caſe, as Dr. Edwards in his anſwer to Dr. Chauncy has fully proved, bleſſings and curſes are in effect the ſame things.

As to our conſidering the ſupreme Being as having created all things for his own glory, I hope it will be allowed that the ſcriptures *ſeem*, at leaſt, to countenance ſuch an idea. They teach us that *God made all things* FOR HIMSELF—that *all things are created by him,*

* *On Diff. of Opin.* § III.

and FOR HIM. He is expreſsly ſaid to have created Iſrael (and, if Iſrael, why not others?) FOR HIS GLORY. Not only *of him, and through him, but* TO HIM *are all things.* Glory, and honour, and power, are aſcribed to him, by the elders and the living creatures; for, ſay they, *Thou haſt created all things; and for* THY PLEASURE *they are and were created.**

But farther, and what is more immediately to the point, I hope this ſentiment will not be alleged as a proof of our want of *love to God;* for it is only aſſigning him the ſupreme place in the ſyſtem of Being; and Dr. Prieſtley himſelf elſewhere ſpeaks of "the love of God, and a regard to his glory," as the ſame thing.† One ſhould think thoſe, on the other hand, who aſſign the happineſs of creatures as God's ultimate end, thereby giving him only a ſubordinate place in the ſyſtem, could not alledge this as an evidence of their love to him. That place which God holds in the great ſyſtem of Being, he ought to hold in our affections; for we are not required to love him in a greater proportion than the place which he occupies requires. If it were otherwiſe, our affections muſt move in a prepoſterous direction. We ought, therefore, on this

* Prov. xvi. 4. Col. i. 16. Iſai. xliii. 7. Heb. ii. 10. Rom. xi. 36. Rev. iv. 11.

† *On Differ. of Opin.* § 1.

ſuppoſition, to love ourſelves, our own happineſs, and the happineſs of our fellow-creatures, *more* than God; for God himſelf is ſuppoſed to do the ſame. But, if ſo, the great rule of human actions ſhould have been different. Inſtead of requiring love to God in the *firſt* place, with all our heart, ſoul, mind, and ſtrength; and *then* love to ourſelves, and our neighbours; it ſhould have been reverſed. The ſong of the angels, too, inſtead of beginning with *Glory to God in the higheſt,* and ending with *peace on earth, and good will to men;* ſhould have placed the laſt firſt, and the firſt laſt. How ſuch a view of things can tend to promote *the love of God,* unleſs a ſubordinate place in our affections be higher than the ſupreme, it is difficult to conceive.

The Great God who fills heaven and earth muſt be allowed to form the far greateſt proportion, if I may ſo ſpeak, of the whole ſyſtem of Being; for compared with him, *all nations,* yea all worlds, *are but as a drop of a bucket, or as the ſmall duſt of the balance.* He is the ſource, and continual ſupport of exiſtence in all its varied forms. As the great guardian of Being in general, therefore, it is fit and right, that he ſhould in the firſt place guard the glory of his own character and government. Nor can this be to the diſadvantage of the univerſe, but the contrary; as will appear if it be conſidered, that

it is the glory of God to do that which ſhall be beſt upon the whole. The glory of God therefore connects with it the general good of the created ſyſtem, and of all its parts, except thoſe whoſe welfare claſhes with the welfare of the whole.

If it were otherwiſe, if the happineſs of *all* creatures were the great end that God from the beginning had in view, then doubtleſs, in order that this end might be accompliſhed, every thing elſe muſt, as occaſion required, give way to it. The glory of his own character, occupying only a ſubordinate place in the ſyſtem, if ever it ſhould ſtand in the way of that which is ſupreme, muſt give place among other things. And if God have conſented to all this, it muſt be becauſe the happineſs, not only of creation in general, but of every individual, is an object of the greateſt magnitude, and moſt fit to be chosen: that is, it is better, and more worthy of God, as the governor of the univerſe, to give up his character for purity, equity, wiſdom, and veracity, and to become vile and contemptible in the eyes of his creatures: it is better that the bands which bind all holy intelligences to him ſhould be broken, and the cords which hold together the whole moral ſyſtem be caſt away, than that the happineſs of a creature ſhould in any in-

ſtance be given up! Judge, ye friends of God, does this conſiſt with "the moſt perfect venera-"tion for the divine character?"

Once more: It ſeems to be generally ſuppoſed by our opponents, that *the worſhip we pay to Chriſt* tends to divide our hearts; and that in proportion as we adore him, we detract from the eſſential glory of the Father. In this view, therefore, they reckon themſelves to exerciſe a greater veneration for God than we. But it is worthy of notice, and particularly the ſerious notice of our opponents, that it is no new thing for an oppoſition to Chriſt to be carried on under the plea of *love to God.* This was the very plea of the Jews when they took up ſtones to ſtone him. *For a good work,* ſaid they, *we ſtone thee not, but for that thou, being a man, makeſt thyſelf* GOD. They very much prided themſelves in their GOD; and under the influence of that ſpirit conſtantly rejected the Lord Jeſus. *Thou art called a Jew, and makeſt thy boaſt of* GOD—*We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even* GOD—*Give* GOD *the praiſe, we know that this man is a ſinner.* It was under the pretext of zeal and friendſhip for GOD, that they at laſt put him to death as a *blaſphemer.* But what kind of zeal was this; and in what manner did Jeſus treat it? *If* GOD *were your Father,* ſaid he, *ye would love me—He that is of* GOD,

heareth GOD'S *words—It is my Father that honoureth me, of whom ye ſay that he is your* GOD; *yet ye have not known him—I know you, that you have not the love of* GOD *in you.**

Again: The primitive chriſtians will be allowed to have loved God aright; yet they worſhipped Jeſus Chriſt. Not only did the martyr Stephen cloſe his life by committing his departing ſpirit into the hands of Jeſus, but it was the common practice in primitive times to invoke his name. He hath authority, ſaid Ananias concerning Saul, to bind *all that call on thy name.* One part of the chriſtian miſſion was to declare, That whoſoever ſhould *call on the name of the Lord* ſhould be ſaved; even of that Lord of whom the gentiles had not heard. Paul addreſſed himſelf to *all that in every place called upon the name of Jeſus Chriſt.* Theſe modes of expreſſion (which if I be not greatly miſtaken, always ſignify divine worſhip) plainly inform us, that it was not merely the practice of a few individuals, but of the great body of the primitive chriſtians, to invoke the name of Chriſt; nay, and that this was a mark by which they were diſtinguiſhed as *chriſtians.*†

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* Rom. ii. 17. John x. 33. viii. 41. ix. 24. viii. 42, 47, 54, 55. v. 42.

† Acts ix. 14. compared with Ver. 17. Rom. x. 11—14. 1 Cor. i. 2.

Farther: It ought to be conſidered, that in worſhipping the Son of God, we worſhip him not on account of that wherein he differs from the Father; but on account of thoſe perfections which we believe him to poſſeſs in common with him. This, with the conſideration that we worſhip him not to the excluſion of the Father, any more than the Father to the excluſion of him, but as *one with him*, removes all apprehenſions from our minds, that in aſcribing glory to the one, we detract from that of the other. Nor can we think, but that theſe ideas are confirmed, and the weight of the objection removed, by thoſe declarations of ſcripture where the Father and the Son are repreſented as being in ſuch union, that *he who hath ſeen the one, hath ſeen the other;* and *he who honoureth the one, honoureth the other;* yea, that *he who honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who ſent him.*[*]

It might fairly be argued in favour of the tendency of calviniſtic doctrines to promote the love of God, that upon thoſe principles we have

[*] John xiv. 7—9. v. 23. The reader may ſee this ſubject ably urged by *Mr. Scott*, in his *Eſſays on the moſt important Subjects of Religion*, First Edition, No. vii. p. 96, 97. The *Eſſays* are of a piece with the other productions of that judicious writer; and, though ſmall, and for the convenience of the poor, ſold for *one penny* each, contain a fund of ſolid, rational, and ſcriptural divinity.

more to love him for, than upon the other. On this ſyſtem we have *much* to be forgiven, and therefore love much. The *expenſe* at which our ſalvation has been obtained, as we believe, furniſhes us with a motive of love to which nothing can be compared. But this I ſhall refer to another place;* and conclude with reminding you, that notwithſtanding Dr. Prieſtley loads calviniſtic principles with ſuch heavy charges as thoſe mentioned at the beginning of this Letter, yet he elſewhere acknowledges them to be "generally favourable to that leading virtue, devotion;" which in effect is acknowledging them to be favourable to *the love of God.*

I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

ON CANDOUR AND BENEVOLENCE TO MEN.

Chriſtian Brethren,

YOU recollect that the calviniſtic ſyſtem ſtands charged by Dr. Prieſtley, not only with being inconſiſtent with a perfect veneration of the divine character, but with "perfect candour and benevolence to man."

This, it muſt be owned, has often been objected to the calviniſts. Their views of things

* Letter xiv.

have been ſuppoſed to render them four and ill-natured towards thoſe who differ from them. Charity, candour, benevolence, liberality, and the like, are virtues to which ſocinians, on the other hand, lay almoſt an excluſive claim. And ſuch a weight do they give theſe virtues in the ſcale of morality, that they conceive themſelves, "upon the whole, even allowing "that they have more of an apparent con-"formity to the world than the trinitarians, "to approach nearer to the proper temper of "chriſtianity than they."*

I ſhall not go about to vindicate calviniſts any farther than I conceive their ſpirit and conduct to admit of a fair vindication; but I am ſatisfied that if things be cloſely examined, it will be found that a great deal of what our opponents attribute to themſelves is not benevolence, or candour; and that a great deal of what they attribute to us, is not owing to the want of either.

Reſpecting *benevolence* or *good-will to men*, in order to be genuine, they muſt conſiſt with love to God. There is ſuch a thing as *partiality* to men, with reſpect to the points in which they and their Maker are at variance; but this is not benevolence. Partiality to a criminal at the bar might induce us to

* Dr. Prieſtley's *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 109.

pity him ſo far as to plead in extenuation of his guilt, and to endeavour to bring him off from the juſt puniſhment of the laws; but this would not be benevolence. There muſt be a *rectitude* in our actions and affections to render them truly virtuous. Regard to the public good muſt keep pace with compaſſion to the miſerable; elſe the latter will degenerate into vice, and lead us to be *partakers of other men's ſins.* Whatever pretence be made to devotion, or love to God, we never admit them to be real, unleſs accompanied with love to men; neither ought any pretence of love to men to be admitted as genuine, unleſs it be accompanied with love to God. Each of theſe virtues is conſidered in the ſcriptures as an evidence of the other. *If a man ſay, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar—By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.**

There is ſuch a thing as *partiality* to men, as obſerved before, with reſpect to the points in which they and their Maker are at variance; leaning to thoſe notions that repreſent their ſin as comparatively little, and their repentance and obedience as a balance againſt it; ſpeaking ſmooth things, and affording flattering intimations that without an atonement,

* 1 John iv. 20. v. 2.

nay, even without repentance in this life, all will be well at laſt. But if it ſhould prove, that God is wholly in the right, and man wholly in the wrong; that ſin is exceeding ſinful; that we all deſerve to be puniſhed with everlaſting deſtruction from the preſence of the Lord; and that, if we be not intereſted in the atonement of Chriſt, this puniſhment muſt actually take place;—if theſe things, I ſay, ſhould at laſt prove true, then all ſuch notions as have flattered the pride of men, and cheriſhed their preſumption, inſtead of being honoured with the epithets of liberal and benevolent, will be called by very different names. The princes and people of Judah would doubtleſs be apt to think the ſentiments taught by *Hananiah*, who propheſied ſmooth things concerning them, much more benevolent and liberal than thoſe of *Jeremiah*, who generally came with heavy tidings; yet true benevolence exiſted only in the latter.* Whether the complexion of the whole ſyſtem of our opponents do not reſemble that of the falſe prophets, who *propheſied ſmooth things, and healed the hurt of the daughter of Iſrael ſlightly, crying peace, peace, when there was no peace;* and whether their objections to our views of things be not the ſame for ſubſtance as might have been

* Jer. xxviii.

made to the true prophets, let all who wiſh to know the truth, however ungrateful it may be to fleſh and blood, decide.

A great deal of what is called *candour* and *benevolence* among ſocinians, is nothing elſe but *indifference to all religious principle.* "If we "could be ſo happy, (ſays Dr. Prieſtley) as to "believe that there are no errors, but what men "may be ſo circumſtanced as to be *innocently* "betrayed into; that any miſtake of the head "is very conſiſtent with rectitude of heart; and "that all differences in modes of worſhip may "be only the different methods by which differ-"ent men (who are equally *the offspring of God*) "are endeavouring to honour and obey their "common parent; our differences of opinion "would have no tendency to leſſen our mutual "love and eſteem."* This is manifeſtly no other than indifference to all religious principle. Such an indifference, it is allowed, would produce a temper of mind which Dr. Prieſtley calls candour and benevolence; but which, in fact, is neither the one, nor the other. Benevolence is *good will to men:* but good will to men is very diſtinct from a good opinion of their principles, or their practices; ſo diſtinct, that the former may exiſt in all its force, without the leaſt degree

* *On Differ. of Opin.* § II.

of the latter. Our Lord thought very ill of the principles and practices of the people of Jeruſalem; yet he *beheld the city, and wept over it.* This was genuine benevolence.

Benevolence is a very diſtinct thing from *complacency* or *eſteem.* Theſe are founded on an approbation of character; the other is not. I am bound by the law of love to bear good will to men, as creatures of God, and as fellow-creatures, ſo as by every mean in my power to promote their welfare, both as to this life, and that which is to come; and all this, let their character be what it may. I am alſo bound to *eſteem* every perſon, for that in him which is truly amiable, be he a friend or an enemy, and to put the beſt conſtruction upon his actions that truth will admit; but no law obliges me to eſteem a perſon reſpecting thoſe things which I have reaſon to conſider as erroneous or vicious. I may pity him, and ought to do ſo; but to eſteem him in thoſe reſpects would be contrary to the love of both God and man. Indifference to religious principle, it is acknowleged, will promote ſuch eſteem. Under the influence of that indifference we may form a good opinion of various characters which otherwiſe we ſhould not do; but the queſtion is, Would that eſteem be right, or amiable? On the contrary, if religious principle of any kind ſhould be found neceſſary to ſalvation;

and if benevolence conſiſt in that good-will to men, which leads us to promote their real welfare, it muſt contradict it; for the welfare of men is promoted by thinking and ſpeaking the truth concerning them. I might ſay, If we could be ſo happy as to think virtue and vice indifferent things, we ſhould then poſſeſs a far greater degree of eſteem for ſome men than we now do; but would ſuch a kind of eſteem be right, or of any uſe either to ourſelves or them?

Candour, as it relates to the treatment of an adverſary, is that temper of mind which will induce us to treat him openly, fairly, and ingenuouſly; granting him every thing that can be granted conſiſtent with truth, and entertaining the moſt favourable opinion of his character and conduct that juſtice will admit. But what has all this to do with indifference to religious principle, as to matters of ſalvation? Is there no ſuch thing as treating a perſon with fairneſs, openneſs, and generoſity, while we entertain a very ill opinion of his principles, and have the moſt painful apprehenſions as to the danger of his ſtate? Let our oppoſents name a more candid writer of controverſy than Preſident Edwards: yet he conſidered many of the ſentiments againſt which he wrote, as deſtructive to the ſouls of men, and thoſe who held them as being in a dangerous ſituation.

As a great deal of what is called candour and benevolence, among ſocinians, is merely the effect of indifference to religious principle; ſo a great deal of that in calviniſts, for which they are accuſed of the want of theſe virtues, is no other than *a ſerious attachment to what they account divine truth, and a ſerious diſapprobation of ſentiments which they deem ſubverſive of it.* Now, ſurely, neither of theſe things is inconſiſtent with either candour or benevolence: if they be, however, Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles are involved in the guilt, equally with the calviniſts. They cultivated ſuch an attachment to religious principle, as to be in real earneſt in the promotion of it; and conſtantly repreſented the knowledge and belief of it as neceſſary to eternal life. *Ye ſhall know the truth,* ſaid Chriſt, *and the truth ſhall make you free—This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jeſus Chriſt whom thou haſt ſent—He that believeth on the Son, hath everlaſting life; and he that believeth not the Son, ſhall not ſee life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.** They alſo conſtantly diſcovered a marked diſapprobation of thoſe ſentiments which tended to introduce *another goſpel,* ſo far as to declare that man accurſed who ſhould propagate them. They conſidered falſe principles as pernicious and

* John viii. 32. xvii. 3. iii. 36.

deſtructive to the ſouls of men. *If ye believe not that I am he,* ſaid Chriſt to the Jews, *ye ſhall die in your ſins—and whither I go ye cannot come.* To the Galatians, who did not fully reject chriſtianity, but in the matter of juſtification were for uniting the works of the law with the grace of the goſpel, Paul teſtified, ſaying, *If ye be circumciſed, Chriſt ſhall profit you nothing.**

Had the apoſtle Paul conſidered "all the "different modes of worſhip as what might be "only the different methods of different men, "endeavouring to honour and obey their com-"mon parent;" he would not have felt *his ſpirit ſtirred in him,* when he ſaw the city of Athens wholly given to idolatry: at leaſt, he would not have addreſſed idolaters in ſuch ſtrong language as he did, *preaching to them that they ſhould turn from theſe vanities unto the living God.* Paul conſidered them as having been all their life employed, not in worſhipping the living God, only in a mode different from others, but *mere vanities.* Nor did he conſider it as a "mere miſtake of the head, into which they "might have been innocently betrayed;" but as a *ſin,* for which they were *without excuſe;* a

* John viii. 21—24. Gal. i. 8. v. 2, 3, 4.

ſin for which he called upon them in the name of the living God to *repent.**

Now, if candour and benevolence be chriſtian virtues, which they doubtleſs are; one ſhould think they muſt conſiſt with the practice of Chriſt and his apoſtles. But if this be allowed, the main ground on which calviniſts are cenſured will be removed; and the candour for which their opponents plead muſt appear to be ſpurious, and foreign to the genuine ſpirit of chriſtianity.

Candour and benevolence, as chriſtian virtues, muſt alſo conſiſt with each other; but the candour of ſocinians is deſtructive of benevolence, as exemplified in the ſcriptures. Benevolence in Chriſt and his apoſtles, extended not merely, nor mainly, to the bodies of men, but to their ſouls; nor did they think ſo favourably of mankind as to deſiſt from warning and alarming them, but the reverſe. They viewed the whole world as *lying in wickedneſs*, in a periſhing condition; and hazarded the loſs of every earthly enjoyment to reſcue them from it, as from the jaws of deſtruction. But it is eaſy to perceive, that in proportion to the influence of ſocinian candour upon us, we ſhall conſider mankind, even the heathens, a race of virtuous Beings, all worſhipping the great Father

* Acts xvii. 16. xiv. 15. Rom. i. 20. Acts xvii. 30.

of creation, only in different modes. Our concern for their ſalvation will conſequently abate, and we ſhall become ſo indifferent reſpecting it, as never to take any conſiderable pains for their converſion. This, indeed, is the very truth with regard to ſocinians. They diſcover, in general, no manner of concern for the ſalvation of either heathens abroad, or profligates at home. Their candour ſupplies the place of this ſpecies of benevolence, and not unfrequently excites a ſcornful ſmile at the conduct of thoſe who exerciſe it.

The difference between our circumſtances and thoſe of Chriſt and his apoſtles, who were divinely inſpired, however much it ought to deter us from paſſing judgment upon the hearts of individuals; ought not to make us think that every mode of worſhip is equally ſafe, or that religious principle is indifferent as to the affairs of ſalvation; for this would be to conſider as falſe, what by divine inſpiration they taught as true.

Let us come to matters of fact. Mr. Belſham does not deny that calviniſts may be 'pi-" ous, candid, and benevolent;" but he thinks they would have been *more ſo* if they had been ſocinians. " They, and there are many ſuch, " (ſays he) who are ſincerely pious, and diffu-

" ſively benevolent *with* theſe principles, could " not have failed to have been much *better*, " and much happier, had they adopted a mil- " der, a more rational, a more truly evangeli- " cal creed."* Now, if this be indeed the caſe, one might expect that the moſt perfect examples of theſe virtues are not to be looked for among us, but among our opponents: and yet it may be queſtioned whether they will pretend to more perfect examples of piety, candour, or benevolence, than are to be found in the characters of a HALE, a FRANCK, a BRAINERD, an EDWARDS, a WHITEFIELD, a THORNTON, and a HOWARD, (to ſay nothing of the living) whoſe lives were ſpent in doing good to the ſouls and bodies of men; and who lived and died depending on the atoning blood and juſtifying righteouſneſs of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. The laſt of theſe great men, in whom his country glories, and who is juſtly conſidered as *the martyr of humanity*, is ſaid thus to have expreſſed himſelf at the cloſe of his laſt Will and Teſtament: " My immortal ſpirit I caſt on the " ſovereign mercy of God, through Jeſus Chriſt, " Who is the Lord of my ſtrength, and I truſt " is become my ſalvation." He is ſaid alſo to have given orders for a plain [illegible] ſtone to be placed upon his grave, with this inſcription, *Spes mea Chriſtus:* CHRIST IS MY HOPE!

* *Sermon on the importance of truth*, p. 30.

We are often reminded of the perſecuting ſpirit of trinitarians, and particularly of *Calvin* toward *Servetus*. This example has been long held up by our opponents, not only as a proof of his cruel diſpoſition, and odious character, but as if it were ſufficient to determine, what muſt be the turn and ſpirit of calviniſts in general. But ſuppoſing the caſe to which they appeal were allowed to prove the cruelty of Calvin's diſpoſition; nay, that he was on the whole, a wicked man, deſtitute both of religion and humanity; What would all this prove as to the tendency of the ſyſtem that happened to be called after his name, but which is allowed to have exiſted long before he was born? We regard what no man did or taught as oracular, unleſs he could prove himſelf divinely inſpired, to which Calvin never pretended. Far be it from us to vindicate him, or any other man, in the buſineſs of perſecution. We abhor every thing of the kind as much as our opponents. Though the principles for which he contended appear to us, in the main, to be juſt; yet the weapons of his warfare, in this inſtance, were carnal.

It ought, however, to be acknowledged on the other ſide, and if our opponents poſſeſſed all the candour to which they pretend, they would in this, as well as in other caſes, ac-

knowledge, that perſecution for religious principles was not at that time peculiar to any party of chriſtians, but common to all, whenever they were inveſted with civil power. It was an error, and a deteſtable one; but it was the error of the age. They looked upon hereſy in the ſame light as we look upon thoſe crimes which are inimical to the peace of civil ſociety; and, accordingly, proceeded to puniſh heretics by the ſword of the civil magiſtrate. If ſocinians did not perſecute their adverſaries ſo much as trinitarians, it was becauſe they were not equally inveſted with the power of doing ſo. Mr. Lindſey acknowledges that *Fauſtus Socinus* himſelf was not free from perſecution in the caſe of *Francis Davides*, ſuperintendent of the unitarian churches in Tranſylvania. *Davides* had diſputed with *Socinus* on the invocation of Chriſt, and "died in priſon in "conſequence of his opinion, and ſome offence "taken at his ſuppoſed indiſcreet propagation "of it from the pulpit. I wiſh I could ſay, "(adds Mr. Lindſey) that *Socinus*, or his friend "*Blandrata* had done all in their power to "prevent his commitment, or procure his re-"leaſe afterwards."—The difference between *Socinus* and *Davides* was very ſlight. They both held Chriſt to be a mere man. The former, however, was for praying to him; which the latter, with much greater conſiſtency, diſ-

approved. Conſidering this, the perſecution to which *Socinus* was acceſſary was as great as that of *Calvin;* and there is no reaſon to think but that if *Davides* had differed as much from *Socinus* as *Servetus* did from *Calvin*, and if the civil magiſtrates had been for burning him, *Socinus* would have concurred with them. To this might be added, that the conduct of *Socinus* was marked with *diſingenuity;* in that he conſidered the opinion of *Davides* in no very heinous point of light; but was afraid of increaſing the odium, under which he and his party already lay, among other chriſtian churches.*

Mr. Robinſon, in his *Eccleſiaſtical Reſearches*, has given an account of both theſe perſecutions; but it is eaſy to perceive the prejudice under which he wrote. He evidently inclines to extenuate the conduct of *Socinus*, while he includes every poſſible circumſtance that can in any manner blacken the memory of *Calvin.* Whatever regard we may bear to the latter, I am perſuaded we ſhould not wiſh to extenuate his conduct in the perſecution of *Servetus;* or to repreſent it in ſofter terms, nor yet ſo ſoft, as Mr. Robinſon has repreſented that of the former in the perſecution of *Davides.*

* *Mr. Lindſey's Apol.* p. 153—156.

We do not accuſe ſocinianiſm of being a perſecuting ſyſtem, on account of this inſtance of miſconduct in *Socinus:* nor is it any proof of the ſuperior candour of our opponents, that they are continually acting the very reverſe towards us. As a *Baptiſt*, I might indulge reſentment againſt *Cranmer*, who cauſed ſome of that denomination to be burned alive: yet I am inclined to think, from all that I have read of *Cranmer*, that notwithſtanding his conduct in thoſe inſtances, he was upon the whole of an amiable diſpoſition. Though he held with pædobaptiſm, and in this manner defended it, yet I ſhould never think of imputing a ſpirit of perſecution to pædobaptiſts in general; or of charging their ſentiment, in that particular, with being of a perſecuting tendency. It was the opinion that *erroneous religious principles are puniſhable by the civil magiſtrate*, that did the miſchief, whether at Geneva, in Tranſylvania, or in Britain; and to this, rather than to trinitarianiſm, or to unitarianiſm, it ought to be imputed.

We need not hold, with Mr. Lindſey, "the "innocence of error," in order to ſhun a ſpirit of perſecution. Though we conceive of error, in many caſes, as criminal in the ſight of God and as requiring admonition, yea excluſion from a *religious* ſociety; yet, while we reject all ideas of its expoſing a perſon to *civil* puniſhment, or

inconvenience, we ought to be acquitted of the charge of perſecution. Where the majority of a religious ſociety conſider the avowed principles of an individual of that ſociety as being fundamentally erroneous, and inconſiſtent with the united worſhip and well-being of the whole; it cannot be perſecution to endeavour by ſcriptural arguments to convince him; and, if that cannot be accompliſhed, to exclude him from their communion.

It has been ſuggeſted, that to think the worſe of a perſon on account of his ſentiments, is a ſpecies of perſecution, and indicates a ſpirit of bitterneſs at the bottom, which is inconſiſtent with that benevolence which is due to all mankind. But if it be perſecution to think the worſe of a perſon, on account of his ſentiments (unleſs no man be better or worſe, whatever ſentiments he imbibes, which very few will care to aſſert) then it muſt be perſecution for us to think of one another according to truth. It is alſo a ſpecies of perſecution, of which our opponents are guilty as well as we, whenever they maintain the ſuperior moral tendency of their own ſyſtem. That which is adapted and intended to do good to the party, cannot be perſecution, but genuine benevolence. Let us ſuppoſe a number of travellers, all propoſing to journey to one place. A number of different ways preſent themſelves to view, and each appears to be

the right way. Some are inclined to one, ſome to another; and ſome contend that, whatever ſmaller difference there may be between them, they all lead to the ſame end. Others, however, are perſuaded that they all do *not* terminate in the ſame end; and appeal to a correct map of the country, which points out a number of bye-paths, reſembling thoſe in queſtion, each leading to a fatal iſſue. Query, Would it be the part of benevolence, in this caſe, for the latter to keep ſilence, and hope the beſt; or to ſtate the evidence on which their apprehenſions were founded, and to warn their fellow-travellers of their danger?

There are, it is acknowledged, many inſtances of a want of candour and benevolence among us; over which it becomes us to lament. This is the caſe eſpecially with thoſe whom Dr. Prieſtley is pleaſed to call "the only conſiſtent abſolute predeſtinarians." I may add, there has been, in my opinion, a great deal too much haughtineſs and uncandidneſs diſcovered by ſome of the trinitarians of the *eſtabliſhed church*, in their controverſies with ſocinian diſſenters. Theſe diſpoſitions, however, do not belong to them as trinitarians, but as churchmen. A ſlight obſervation of human nature will convince us, that the adherents to a religion eſtabliſhed by law, let their ſentiments be what they may,

will always be under a powerful temptation to take it for granted that they are right, and that all who diſſent from them are contemptible ſectaries, unworthy of a candid and reſpectful treatment. This temptation, it is true, will not have equal effect upon all in the ſame community. Serious and humble characters will watch againſt it; and, being wiſe enough to know that real worth is not derived from any thing merely external, they may be ſuperior to it. But thoſe of another deſcription will be very differently affected.

There is, indeed, a mixture of evil paſſions in all our religious affections, againſt which it becomes us to watch and pray. I ſee many things in thoſe of my own ſentiments which I cannot approve; and, poſſibly, others may ſee the ſame in me. And ſhould the ſocinians pretend to the contrary, with reſpect to themſelves, or aſpire at a ſuperiority to their neighbours, it may be more than they are able to maintain. It cannot eſcape the obſervation of thinking and impartial men, that the candour of which they ſo frequently boaſt, is pretty much confined to their own party, or thoſe that are near a-kin to them. Socinians can be candid to arians, and arians to ſocinians, and each of them to deiſts; but if calviniſts expect a ſhare of their tenderneſs, let them not greatly wonder if they

be diſappointed. There need not be a greater or a more ſtanding proof of this, than the manner in which the writings of the latter are treated in the *Monthly Review*.

It has been frequently obſerved, that though ſocinian writers plead ſo much for candour and eſteem among profeſſing chriſtians, yet, generally ſpeaking, there is ſuch a mixture of ſcornful contempt diſcovered towards their opponents, as renders their profeſſions far from conſiſtent. Mr. *Lindſey* very charitably accounts for our errors, by aſſerting that "the "doctrine, of Chriſt being poſſeſſed of two "natures, is the fiction of ingenious men, "*determined at all events to believe Chriſt to* "*be a different Being from what he really* "*was, and uniformly declared himſelf to be;* "by which fiction of their's, they elude the "plaineſt declarations of ſcripture concerning "him, and *will prove him to be the moſt high* "*God, in ſpite of his own moſt expreſs and* "*conſtant language to the contrary.* And as "there is no reaſoning with ſuch perſons, "they are to be pitied, and conſidered as "being under a debility of mind in this re-"ſpect, however ſenſible and rational in o-"thers."* Would Mr. Lindſey wiſh to have this conſidered as a ſpecimen of ſocinian can-

* *Catechiſ.* Enquiry 6.

dour? If Mrs. *Barbauld* had been poſſeſſed of candour equal to her ingenuity, inſtead of ſuppoſing that calviniſts derive their ideas of election, the atonement, future puniſhment, &c. from the tyranny and caprice of an eaſtern deſpot, ſhe might have admitted, whether they were right or not, that thoſe principles appeared to them to be taught in the bible.*

If we may eſtimate the candour of ſocinians, from the ſpirit diſcovered by Mr. *Robinſon* in the latter part of his life, the concluſion will not be very favourable to their ſyſtem. At the time when this writer profeſſed himſelf a calviniſt, he could acknowledge thoſe who differed from him, with reſpect to the divinity of Chriſt, as "miſ-"taken brethren;" at which time his opponents could not well complain of his being uncandid. But when he comes to change his ſentiments on that article, he treats thoſe from whom he differs in a very different manner, loading them with every ſpecies of abuſe. Witneſs his treatment of *Auguſtine;* whoſe conduct, previous to his converſion to chriſ-

* A friend of mine on looking over *Mrs. Barbauld's* Pamphlet, in anſwer to Mr. Wakefield, remarks as follows: "Mrs. B. "uſed to call ſocinianiſm, *The frigid zone of chriſtianity*, but ſhe "is now got far north herſelf. She is amazingly clever; her "language enchanting; but her caricature of calviniſm "abominable."

tianity, though lamented with all the tokens of penitential ſorrow, and entirely forſaken in the remaining period of his life, he induſtriouſly repreſents to his diſadvantage; calling him "a pretended ſaint, but an illiterate hy-"pocrite, of wicked diſpoſitions;" loading his memory, and even the very country where he lived, with every opprobrious epithet that could be deviſed.* Similar inſtances might be added from his *Eccleſiaſtical Reſearches*, in which the characters of *Calvin* and *Beza* are treated in an equally uncandid manner.†

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* *Hiſt. of Baptism*, p. 652.

† Mr. *Robinson*, in his notes on *Claude* obſerves, from Mr. *Burgh*, that "Whatever occurs in modern writers of His-"tory, of a narrative nature, we find to be an inference from "a ſyſtem previouſly aſſumed, without any view to the ſeeming "truth of the facts recorded; but to the eſtabliſhment of which "the hiſtorian appears, through every ſpecies of miſrepre-"ſentation, to have zealouſly directed his force—The ſub-"verſion of freedom was the evident purpoſe of Mr. Hume, "in writing the *Hiſtory of England*. I fear we may with "too much juſtice affirm the ſubverſion of chriſtianity to "be the object of Mr. Gibbon, in writing his *Hiſtory of* "*the decline and fall of the Roman Empire*," Vol. II. pp. 147, 111. Perhaps it might with equal propriety be added, that the ſubverſion of what is commonly called orthodoxy, and the vindication, or palliation, of every thing which in every age has been called by the name of hereſy, were the objects of Mr. Robinſon in writing his *Hiſtory of Baptism*, and, what has ſince been publiſhed under the title of *Eccleſiaſtical Reſearches*.

Dr. *Prieſtley* himſelf, who is ſaid to be the moſt candid man of his party, is ſeldom overloaded with this virtue when he is dealing with calviniſts. It does not diſcover a very great degree of perfection in this, or even in common civility, to call thoſe who conſider his principles as pernicious, by the name of "bigots, the bigots," &c., which he very frequently does. Nor is it to the credit of his *impartiality*, any more than of his candour, when weighing the moral excellence of trinitarians and unitarians againſt each other, as in a balance, to ſuppoſe, "the former to "have *leſs* and the latter ſomething *more*, of "a real principle of religion than they ſeem "to have."* This looks like taking a portion out of one ſcale, and caſting it into the other, for the purpoſe of making weight where it was wanting.

Dr. Prieſtley, in anſwer to Mr. *Burn*, *On the perſon of Chriſt*, acquits him of "any "thing baſe, diſingenuous, immoral or wicked;" and ſeeing Mr. Burn had not acquitted him of all ſuch things in return, the doctor takes occaſion to boaſt that "his principles, what-"ever they are, are more *candid* than thoſe "of Mr. Burn."† But if this acknowledge-

* *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 100.

† *Famil. Letters. Let.* xviii.

ment, candid as it may ſeem, be compared with another paſſage in the ſame performance, it will appear to leſs advantage. In Letter the fifth, the doctor goes about to account for the *motives* of his opponents, and if the following language do not inſinuate any thing "baſe, immoral, or wicked," to have influenced Mr. Burn, it may be difficult to decide what baſeneſs, immorality, or wickedneſs is. "As to Mr. Burn's being willing to have "*a gird at me*, as Falſtaff ſays, it may eaſily "be accounted for. He has a view to riſe "in his profeſſion, and being a man of good "natural underſtanding, and good elocution, "but having had no advantage of education, "or family connexions, he may think it ne-"ceſſary to do ſomething in order to make "himſelf conſpicuous; and he might ſuppoſe "he could not do better than follow the ſure "ſteps of thoſe who had ſucceeded in the "ſame chaſe before him." What can any perſon make of theſe two paſſages put together? It muſt appear, either that Dr. Prieſtley accuſed Mr. Burn of motives, of which in his conſcience he did not believe him to be guilty; or that he acquitted him of every thing baſe and wicked, not becauſe he thought him ſo, but merely with a view to glory over him by affecting to be under the influence of ſuperior candour and generoſity.

The manner in which Dr. Prieſtley has treated Mr. *Badcock*, in his *Familiar Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham*, holding him up as an immoral character, at a time when, unleſs ſome valuable end could have been anſwered by it, his memory ſhould have been at reſt, is thought to be very far from either candour or benevolence. The doctor and Mr. Badcock, ſeem to have been heretofore upon friendly terms; and not very widely aſunder as to ſentiment. Private letters paſs between them; and Mr. Badcock always acknowledges Dr. Prieſtley his ſuperior. But about 1783, Mr. Badcock oppoſes his friend in the *Monthly Review*, and is thought by many to have the advantage of him. After this, he is ſaid to act ſcandalouſly and diſhoneſtly. He dies; and ſoon after his death, Dr. Prieſtley avails himſelf of his former correſpondence to expoſe his diſhoneſty: and, as if this were not enough, ſupplies from his own conjectures what was wanting of fact, to render him completely odious to mankind.

Dr. Prieſtley may plead, that he has held up "the example of this unhappy man as a warning to others." So, indeed, he ſpeaks; but thinking people will ſuppoſe, that if this *Zimri* had not *ſlain his maſter, his bones might have reſted in peace.* Dr. Prieſtley had juſt

cauſe for expoſing the author of a piece, ſigned *Theodoſius*, in the manner he has done in thoſe Letters. Juſtice to himſelf required this: but what neceſſity was there for expoſing Mr. Badcock? Allowing that there was ſufficient evidence to ſupport the heavy charge, wherein does this affect the merits of the cauſe? Does proving a man a villain anſwer his arguments? Is it worthy of a generous antagoniſt to avail himſelf of ſuch methods to prejudice the public mind? Does it belong to a controvertiſt to write his opponent's hiſtory, after he is dead, and to hold up his character in a diſadvantageous light, ſo as to depreciate his writings?

Whatever good opinion ſocinian writers may entertain of the ability and integrity of ſome few individuals who differ from them, it is pretty evident that they have the *candour* to conſider the body of their opponents as either *ignorant* or *inſincere*. By the Poem which Mr. Badcock wrote in praiſe of Dr. Prieſtley, when he was, as the doctor informs us, his "humble admirer," we may ſee in what light we are conſidered by our adverſaries. Trinitarians, among the *clergy*, are there repreſented as "ſticking faſt to the church for the ſake of 'a living;" and thoſe whom the writer calls "orthodox, popular preachers," (which I ſuppoſe may principally refer to *diſſenters*, and

methodiſts) are deſcribed as *fools* and *enthuſiaſts;* as either "ſtaring, ſtamping, and damning in "nonſenſe;" or elſe, "whining out the tidings "of ſalvation; telling their auditors that grace "is cheap, and works are all an empty bubble." All this is publiſhed by Dr. Prieſtley, in his *Twenty-ſecond Letter to the Inhabitants of Birmingham;* and that without any marks of diſapprobation. Dr. Prieſtley himſelf, though he does not deſcend to ſo low and ſcurrilous a manner of writing as the above, yet ſuggeſts the ſame thing, in the Dedication of his *Doctrine of Philoſophical Neceſſity.* He there praiſes Dr. *Jebb*, for his "attachment "to the unadulterated principles of chriſti-"anity, how unpopular ſoever they may have "become, through the prejudices of the *weak*, "or the *intereſted* part of mankind."

After all, it is allowed that Dr. Prieſtley is in general, and eſpecially when he is not dealing with a calviniſt, a fair and candid opponent: much more ſo than the *Monthly Reviewers:* who, with the late Mr. Badcock, ſeem to rank among his "humble admirers." Candid and open, however, as Dr. Prieſtley

* About eight or nine years ago, the *Monthly Review* was at open war with Dr. Priestley; and the doctor, like an incenſed monarch, ſummoned all his mighty reſources to ex-

in general is, the above are certainly no very trifling exceptions: and, conſidering him as excelling moſt of his party in this virtue, they are ſufficient to prove the point for which they are alleged; namely, that when ſocinians profeſs to be more candid than their opponents, their profeſſion includes more than their conduct will juſtify.

I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR TENDENCY TO PROMOTE HUMILITY.

Chriſtian Brethren,

YOU recollect the prophecy of Iſaiah, in which, ſpeaking of goſpel times, he predicts, that *the loftineſs of man ſhall be bowed down, and the haughtineſs of men ſhall be made low, and the Lord alone ſhall be exalted in that day;* as if it were one peculiar characteriſtic of the true goſpel to lay low the pride of man. The whole

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poſe its weakneſs and to degrade it in the eye of the public. The conductors of the Review, although finding, it ſeems, [illegible] *their country was nourished by the king's country, desired to be* [illegible]. They have ever ſince very punctually paid him *tribute*; and the conqueror ſeems very well contented, on this condition, to grant them his favour and protection.

tenour of the new teſtament enforces the ſame idea. *Ye ſee your calling brethren, how that not many wiſe men after the fleſh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God hath choſen the fooliſh things of the world, to confound the wiſe; and God hath choſen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and baſe things of the world, and things which are deſpiſed, hath God choſen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no fleſh ſhould glory in his preſence—Jeſus ſaid, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, becauſe thou haſt hid theſe things from the wiſe and prudent, and haſt revealed them unto babes—Where is boaſting? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith.** It may be concluded with certainty from theſe paſſages, and various others of the ſame import, that the ſyſtem which has the greateſt tendency to promote this virtue, approaches neareſt to the true goſpel of Chriſt.

Pride, the oppoſite of humility, may be diſtinguiſhed, by its objects, into natural and ſpiritual. Both conſiſt in a too high eſteem of ourſelves: the one, on account of thoſe accompliſhments which are merely natural, or which pertain to us as men; the other on account of

* 1 Cor. i. 26–29. Matt. xi. 25. Rom. iii. 27.

thoſe which are ſpiritual, or which pertain to us as good men. With reſpect to the firſt, it is not very difficult to know who they are that aſcribe moſt to their own underſtanding; that profeſs to believe in nothing but what they can comprehend; that arrogate to themſelves the name of *rational chriſtians;* that affect to "pity all thoſe who maintain the doctrine of "two natures in Chriſt, as being under a debi- "lity of mind in this reſpect, however ſen- "ſible and rational in others;"* that pour compliments extravagantly upon one another;† that ſpeak of their own party as the wiſe and learned, and of their opponents as the ignorant and illiterate who are carried away by vulgar prejudices;‡ that tax the ſacred writers with "reaſoning inconcluſively," and writing "lame accounts;" and that repreſent themſelves as men of far greater compaſs of mind than they, or than even Jeſus Chriſt himſelf!

The laſt of theſe particulars may excite ſurpriſe. Charity, that hopeth all things, will be ready to ſuggeſt, Surely, no man that calls himſelf a chriſtian, will dare to ſpeak ſo arrogantly. I acknowledge I ſhould have thought ſo, if I had not read in Dr. Prieſtley's *Doc-*

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* Mr. Lindsey's *Catechist, Enquiry* 6.

† Mr. Toulmin's *Serm. on the Death of Mr. Robinson*, p. 47, 56.

‡ Mr. Belsham's *Sermon on the importance of Truth*, p. 4, 32.

trine of philoſophical neceſſity, as follows: "Not "that I think that the ſacred writers were "*neceſſarians*, for they were not *philoſophers;* "not even our Saviour himſelf, as far as ap-"pears:—But their habitual devotion naturally "led them to refer all things to God, without "reflecting on the rigorous meaning of their "language; and very probably, had they been "interrogated on the ſubject, they would have "appeared not to be appriſed of the neceſſarian "ſcheme, and would have anſwered in a manner "unfavourable to it."* The ſacred writers, it ſeems, were well-meaning perſons; but at the ſame time ſo ignorant, as not to know the meaning of their own language; nay, ſo ignorant, that, had it been explained to them, they would have been incapable of taking it in! Nor is this ſuggeſted of the ſacred writers only; but, as it ſhould ſeem, of Jeſus Chriſt himſelf. A very fit perſon Jeſus Chriſt muſt be, indeed, to be addreſſed as *knowing all things;* as a *revealer* of the mind of God to men; as *the wiſdom of God;* as he in whom *it pleaſed the Father that all fulneſs ſhould dwell;* by whom the judges of the earth are exhorted to be *inſtructed;* and who ſhall *judge the world* at the laſt day; when, in fact, he was ſo ignorant as not to conſider the meaning of his own language; or

* Page 133.

if he had been interrogated upon it, would not have been appriſed of the extent of the ſcheme which his words naturally led to, but would probably have anſwered in a manner unfavourable to it! Is this the language of one that is *little in his own eyes?*

But there is ſuch a thing as *ſpiritual* pride, or a too high eſteem of ourſelves on account of ſpiritual accompliſhments; and this, together with a ſpirit of *bigotry*, Dr. Prieſtley imputes to trinitarians. "Upon the whole, (ſays he) conſidering the great mixture of ſpiritual pride and bigotry in ſome of the moſt zealous trinitarians, I think the moral character of unitarians in general, allowing that there is in them a greater apparent conformity to the world than is obſervable in others, approaches more nearly to the proper temper of chriſtianity. It is more cheerful, more benevolent, and more candid. The former have probably leſs, and the latter, I hope, ſomewhat more, of a real principle of religion, than they ſeem to have."* To this it is replied,

Firſt, If trinitarians be proud at all, it ſeems it muſt be of their ſpirituality; for, as to rationality, they have none, their opponents

* *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 109.

having by a kind of excluſive charter, monopolized that article. It is their misfortune, it ſeems, when inveſtigating the doctrine of the perſon of Chriſt, to be under a "debility of mind," or a kind of periodical infanity.

Secondly: Admitting that a greater degree of ſpiritual pride exiſts among trinitarians, than among their opponents; if we were, for once, to follow Dr. Prieſtley's example, it might be accounted for without any reflexion upon their principles. Pride is a ſin that eaſily beſets human nature, though nothing is more oppoſite to the ſpirit that becomes us: and, whatever it is in which a body of men excel, they are under a peculiar temptation to be proud of that rather than of other things. The Engliſh people have been often charged by their neighbours with pride, on account of their civil conſtitution; and, I ſuppoſe, it has not been without reaſon. They have conceived themſelves to excel other nations in that particular; have been apt to value themſelves upon it; and to undervalue their neighbours more than they ought. This has been their fault: but it does not prove that their civil conſtitution has not, after all, its excellencies. Nay, perhaps, the reaſon why ſome of their neighbours have not been ſo proud in this particular as they, is, they have not had that to be proud of. Chriſtians in ge-

neral are more likely to be the ſubjects of ſpiritual pride than avowed infidels; for, the pride of the latter, though it may riſe to the higheſt pitch imaginable, will not be in their *ſpirituality*. The ſame may be ſaid of ſocinians. For, while "a great number of them are only "men of good ſenſe, and without much prac-"tical religion," as Dr. Prieſtley acknowledges they are,* their pride will not be in their ſpirituality, but in their ſuppoſed rationality.

Thirdly: Let it be conſidered whether our doctrinal ſentiments do not bear a nearer affinity to thoſe principles which in ſcripture are conſtantly urged as motives to humility, than thoſe of our opponents.—The doctrines inculcated by Chriſt and his apoſtles, in order to lay men low in the duſt before God, were thoſe of human depravity, and ſalvation by free and ſovereign grace through Jeſus Chriſt. The language held out by our Lord was, that he *came to ſeek and to ſave that which was loſt*. The general ſtrain of his preaching tended to inform mankind, not only that he came to ſave *loſt* ſinners; but that no man under any other character could partake of the bleſſings of ſalvation. *I came*, ſaith he, *not to call the righteous, but ſinners to repentance*

* Diſcourſes on Various Subjects p. 100.

The whole need not a phyſician, but they that are ſick. To the ſame purpoſe the apoſtle of the Gentiles declared to the Epheſians, *You hath quickened who were dead in treſpaſſes and ſins: wherein, in time paſt, ye walked according to the courſe of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the ſpirit that now worketh in the children of diſobedience.* Nor did he ſpeak this of gentiles, or of profligates only; but though himſelf a jew, and educated a phariſee, he added, *Among whom alſo we all had our converſation in times paſt, in the luſts of our fleſh, fulfilling the deſires of the fleſh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath even as others.* To the doctrine of the univerſal depravity of human nature, we very properly and joyfully proceed to oppoſe that of God's rich mercy. *But God who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in ſins, hath quickened us together with Chriſt.* The humbling doctrine of ſalvation by undeſerved favour was ſo natural an inference from theſe premiſes, that the apoſtle could not forbear throwing in ſuch a reflection, though it were in a parentheſis; *By grace ye are ſaved!* Nor did he leave it there, but preſently after drew the ſame concluſion more fully: *For by grace ye are ſaved through faith; and that not of*

*yourſelves; it is the gift of God. Not of works, leſt any man ſhould boaſt.** To the ſame purport he taught in his other epiſtles: *Who hath ſaved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpoſe and grace, which was given us in Chriſt Jeſus before the world began—Not by works of righteouſneſs which we have done, but according to his mercy he ſaved us—Of him are ye in Chriſt Jeſus, who of God is made unto us wiſdom, and righteouſneſs, and ſanctification, and redemption: that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*†

Theſe, we ſee, were the ſentiments by which Chriſt and his apoſtles taught men humility, and cut off boaſting. But as though it were deſigned in perfect oppoſition to the apoſtolic doctrine, ſocinian writers are conſtantly exclaiming againſt the calviniſtic ſyſtem, becauſe it maintains the inſufficiency of a good moral life to recommend us to the favour of God. "Repentance and a good life, (ſays "Dr. Prieſtley) are *of themſelves* ſufficient to "recommend us to the divine favour."‡— "When, (ſays Mrs. Barbauld) will chriſti- "ans permit themſelves to believe, that the

* Ephes. ii. 1—9. † 2 Tim. i. 9. Titus iii. 5. 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

‡ *Hiſt. of Corrup. of Chriſtianity*, Vol. I. p. 155.

"same conduct which gains them the appro-
"bation of good men here, will secure the
"favour of heaven hereafter?—When a man,
"like Dr. Price, is about to resign his soul
"into the hands of his Maker, he ought to
"do it not only with a reliance on his mercy,
"but his *justice*—It does not become him to
"pay the blasphemous homage of deprecating
"the wrath of God, when he ought to throw
"himself into the arms of his love."*—"Other
"foundation than this can no man lay: (says Dr.
"Harwood) All hopes founded upon any thing
"else than a good moral life, are merely ima-
"ginary."† *So they wrap it up.* If a set of writers united together, and studied to form an hypothesis in perfect contradiction to the holy scriptures, and the declared humbling tendency of the gospel, they could not have hit upon a point more directly to their purpose. The whole tenor of the gospel says, *It is* NOT *of works, lest any man should boast:* But socinian writers maintain, that it IS of works, and of them only; that in this, and in no other way, is the divine favour to be obtained. We might ask, *Where is boasting then? Is it excluded?* NAY; Is it not admitted and cherished?

Christ and his apostles inculcated humility, by teaching the primitive christians that

* Letter to Mr. Wakefield. † Sermons, p. 104

virtue itſelf was not of themſelves, but the gift of God. They not only expreſsly declared this with reſpect to faith, but the ſame, in effect, of every particular included in the general notion of true godlineſs. *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itſelf*, ſaid Chriſt, *except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me*: for *without me ye can do nothing—We are his workmanſhip, created in Chriſt Jeſus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we ſhould walk in them—He worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good pleaſure.** The manifeſt deſign of theſe important ſayings was, to humble the primitive chriſtians, and to make them feel their entire dependance upon God for virtue, even for every *good thought*. *Who maketh thee to differ*, ſaid the apoſtle, *and what haſt thou that thou didſt not receive? Now if thou didſt receive it, why doſt thou glory as if thou hadſt not received it?*† The calviniſtic ſyſtem, it is well known, includes the ſame things: but where is the place for them, or where do they appear, in the ſyſtem of our opponents? Dr. Prieſtley, in profeſſed oppoſition to calviniſm, maintains, that "it depends "entirely upon a man's *ſelf* whether he be "virtuous or vicious, happy or miſerable;"‡

* John xv. 4, 5. Eph. ii. 10. Phil ii. 13.
† 1 Cor. iv. 7.
‡ *Doc. of Neceſſity*, p. 193.

That is to say, it is a man's self that maketh him to differ from another; and he has that (namely virtue) which he did not receive, and which therefore he may glory.*

Dr. Priestley replies to this kind of reasoning, "When we consider ourselves as *the workmanship of God;* that all our powers, of "body and of mind, are derived from him; "that he is *the giver of every good and of every perfect gift*, and that without him we can "do and enjoy nothing, how can we conceive ourselves to be in a state of greater

* It is true, Dr. Priestley himself sometimes allows that virtue is *not our own*, and does *not arise from within ourselves;* calling that more *heathen stoicism*, which maintains the contrary: and tells us, that "those persons, who, from a principle of "religion, ascribe more to God, and less to man, are persons "of the greatest elevation in piety." *On Necessity*, pp. 107, 108. Yet in the same performance he represents it as a part of the necessarian scheme, by which it is opposed to calvinism, that "it depends entirely upon a man's *self* whether he be virtuous or vicious." P. 153. If Dr. Priestley mean no more by these expressions, than that our conduct in life, whether virtuous or vicious, depends upon our choice, the calvinistic scheme, as well as his own, allows of it. But if he mean that a virtuous choice originates in ourselves, and that we are the proper cause of it, this can agree to nothing but the arminian notion of a self-determining power in the will, and that in fact, as he himself elsewhere observes, is "mere *heathen stoicism*, which allows men to pray for external things, but admonishes them, that, as for virtue, it *is our own*, and must "arise *from within ourselves*, if we have it at all" P. 69.

" dependance, or obligation; that is, what " greater reaſon or foundation can there poſ- " ſibly be for the exerciſe of *humility?* If I " believe that I have a power to do the duty " that God requires of me; yet as I alſo " believe that that power is his gift, I muſt " ſtill ſay, *What have I that I have not re-* " *ceived, and how then can I glory, as if I* " *had not received it?*"*

It is true, Dr. Prieſtley, and for ought I know, all other writers, except atheiſts, acknowledge themſelves indebted to God for the powers by which virtue is attained, and perhaps for the means of attaining it; but this is not acknowledging that we are indebted to him for virtue itſelf. Powers and opportunities are mere natural bleſſings; they have no virtue in them, but are a kind of talent capable of being improved, or not improved. Virtue conſiſts, not in the poſſeſſion of natural powers, any more than in health, or learning, or riches; but in the uſe that is made of them. God does not, therefore, upon this principle, give us virtue. Dr. Prieſtley contends, that as we are " God's *workman-* " *ſhip*, and derive all our powers of body and " mind from him, we cannot conceive of our- " ſelves as being in a ſtate of greater depen-

" dance upon him." The apoſtle Paul, however, teaches the neceſſity of being *created in Chriſt Jeſus unto good works.* According to Paul, we muſt become his *workmanſhip* by a new creation, in order to the performance of good works: but according to Dr. Prieſtley, the firſt creation is ſufficient. Now, if ſo, the *difference* between one man and another is not to be aſcribed to God: for it is ſuppoſed, that God has given all men the powers of attaining virtue, and that the difference between the virtuous man and his neighbour is to be aſcribed to himſelf, in making a good uſe of the powers and opportunities with which he was inveſted. Upon this ſyſtem, therefore, we may juſtly anſwer the queſtion, *What haſt thou which thou haſt not received?* I have *virtue*, and the promiſe of eternal life as its reward, and conſequently have whereof to glory. In ſhort, the whole of Dr. Prieſtley's conceſſions amount to nothing more than the heathen ſtoiciſm, which he elſewhere condemns. Thoſe ancient philoſophers could not deny, that all their powers were originally derived from above; yet they maintained " that as for virtue, it is *our own*, and muſt " ariſe *from within ourſelves* if we have it " at all."

I do not deny that all men have natural powers, together with means and opportunities of doing good; which, if they were but completely well-diſpoſed, are equal to the performance of their whole duty. God requires no more of us, than to love and ſerve him with ALL *our ſtrength.* Theſe powers and opportunities render them accountable beings, and will leave them without excuſe at the laſt day. But if they are *not* rightly diſpoſed, all their natural powers will be abuſed; and the queſtion is, To whom are we indebted for *a change of diſpoſition?* If to God, we have reaſon to lie in the duſt, and acknowledge it was he that *quickened us, when were dead in ſins:* if to ourſelves, the doctrine of the ſtoics will be eſtabliſhed, and we ſhall have *whereof to glory.*

I am &c.

LETTER X.

ON CHARITY: IN WHICH IS CONSIDERED THE CHARGE OF BIGOTRY.

Chriſtian Brethren,

THE main reaſon why we are accuſed of ſpiritual pride, bigotry, uncharitableneſs, and the like, is, the *importance* which we aſcribe to

ſome of our ſentiments. Viewing them as eſſential to chriſtianity, we cannot, properly ſpeaking, acknowledge thoſe who reject them as chriſtians. It is this which provokes the reſentment of our opponents, and induces them to load us with opprobrious epithets. We have already touched upon this topic, in the *Letter on Candour*, but will now conſider it more particularly.

It is allowed, that we ought not to judge of whole bodies of men by the denomination under which they paſs; becauſe names do not always deſcribe the real principles they embrace. It is poſſible that a perſon who attends upon a very unſound miniſtry, may not underſtand or adopt ſo much of the ſyſtem which he hears inculcated, as that his diſpoſition ſhall be formed, or his conduct regulated, by it. I have heard, from perſons who have been much converſant with ſocinians, that though, in general, they are of a looſe diſſipated turn of mind, aſſembling in the gay circles of pleaſure, and following the cuſtoms and manners of the world; yet that there are ſome among them who are more ſerious; and that theſe, if not in their converſation, yet in their ſolemn addreſſes to the Almighty, incline to the doctrines of calviniſm. This perfectly accords with Mrs.

Barbauld's repreſentation of the matter, as noticed towards the cloſe of the *Sixth Letter*. Theſe people are not, properly ſpeaking, ſocinians; and, therefore, ought to be left quite out of the queſtion. For the queſtion is, Whether, as believing in the deity and atonement of Chriſt, with other correſpondent doctrines, we be required by the charity inculcated in the goſpel, to acknowledge, as fellow-chriſtians, thoſe who thoroughly and avowedly reject them?

It is no part of the buſineſs of this Letter, to prove that theſe doctrines are true; this, at preſent, I have a right to take for granted. The fair ſtate of the objection, if delivered by a ſocinian, would be to this effect: 'Though your ſentiments ſhould be right, yet, 'by refuſing to acknowledge others who differ 'from you, as fellow-chriſtians, you over-rate 'their importance, and ſo violate the charity 'recommended by the goſpel.' To the objection as thus ſtated, I ſhall endeavour to reply.

Charity, it is allowed, will induce us to put the moſt favourable conſtruction upon things, and to entertain the moſt favourable opinion of perſons, that truth will admit. It is far from the ſpirit of chriſtianity, to indulge a cenſorious temper, or to take pleaſure in drawing unfavourable concluſions againſt any perſon what-

ever; but the tendereſt diſpoſition towards mankind cannot convert truth into falſehood, or falſehood into truth. Unleſs, therefore, we reject the bible, and the belief of *any* thing as neceſſary to ſalvation; though we ſhould ſtretch our good opinion of men to the greateſt lengths, yet we muſt ſtop ſomewhere. Charity itſelf does not ſo *believe all things*, as to diſregard truth and evidence. We are ſometimes reminded of our Lord's command, *Judge not, leſt ye be judged.* This language is doubtleſs deſigned to reprove a cenſorious diſpoſition, which leads people to paſs *unjuſt* judgment, or to diſcern *a mote in a brother's eye, while they are blind to a beam in their own:* but it cannot be intended to forbid *all* judgment whatever, even upon characters; for this would be contrary to what our Lord teaches in the ſame diſcourſe, warning his diſciples to *beware of falſe prophets, who would come to them in ſheep's cloathing:* adding, *Ye ſhall know them by their fruits.** Few pretend, that we ought to think favourably of *profligate* characters; or that it is any breach of charity to think unfavourably concerning them. But, if the words of our Lord be underſtood as forbidding *all judgment whatever* upon characters, it muſt be wrong to paſs any judgment

* Matt. vii. 1, 2, 3, 15, 16.

upon them. Nay, it muſt be wrong for a miniſter to declare to a drunkard, a thief, or an adulterer, that, if he die in his preſent condition, he muſt periſh; becauſe this is judging the party not to be in a ſtate of ſalvation.

All the uſe that is commonly made of our Lord's words, is in favour of *ſentiments*, not of *actions:* but the ſcriptures make no ſuch diſtinction. Men are there repreſented as being under the wrath of God, who have *not believed* on the name of the only-begotten Son of God; nor is there any thing intimated in our Lord's expreſſions, as if the judgment which he forbade his diſciples to paſs, were to be confined to matters of ſentiment. The judgment which is there reproved, is *partial* or *wrong* judgment, whether it be on account of ſentiment, or of practice. Even thoſe who plead againſt judging perſons on account of ſentiment (many of them at leaſt) allow themſelves to think unfavourably of avowed infidels, who have heard the goſpel, but continue to reject it. They themſelves, therefore, do judge unfavourably of men on account of their ſentiments; and muſt do ſo, unleſs they will reject the bible, which declares unbelievers to be under condemnation.

Dr. Prieſtley, however, ſeems to extend his favourable opinion to idolators and infi-

dels, without diſtinction. "All differences in "modes of worſhip, (he ſays) may be only the "different methods by which different men "(who are equally *the offspring of God)* are "endeavouring to honour and obey their com-"mon parent."* He alſo inveighs againſt a ſuppoſition, that the mere holding of any *opinions* (ſo it ſeems the great articles of our faith muſt be called) ſhould exclude men from the favour of God. It is true, what he ſays is guarded ſo much, as to give the argument he engages to ſupport a very plauſible appearance; but withal ſo ill directed, as not in the leaſt to affect that of his opponents. His words are theſe: "Let thoſe who maintain "that the mere holding of any *opinions* (with-"out regard to the *motives and ſtate of mind* "through which men may have been led to "form them) will neceſſarily exclude them "from the favour of God, be particularly care-"ful with reſpect to the premiſes from which "they draw ſo alarming a concluſion." The counſel contained in theſe words is undoubtedly very good. Thoſe premiſes ought to be well founded from whence ſuch a concluſion is drawn. I do not, indeed, ſuppoſe, that any ground for ſuch a concluſion exiſts; and who they are that draw it I cannot tell. The *mere*

* *On Diſſer. of Opin.* § II.

holding of an opinion, conſidered abſtractedly from the motive, or ſtate of mind of him that holds it, muſt be ſimply an exerciſe of intellect; and, I am inclined to think, has in it neither good nor evil. But the queſtion is, Whether there be not truths, which, from the nature of them, cannot be rejected without an evil bias of heart? And, therefore, where we ſee thoſe truths rejected, Whether we have not authority to conclude that ſuch rejection muſt have ariſen from an evil bias?

If a man ſay, *There is no God*, the ſcripture teaches us to conſider it, rather as the language of his *heart*, than ſimply of his judgment; and makes no ſcruple of calling him a *fool;* which according to the ſcriptural idea of the term, is equal to calling him a *wicked man.* And let it be ſeriouſly conſidered, upon what other principle our Lord could ſend forth his diſciples to *preach the goſpel to every creature*, and add as he did, *He that believeth and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved; and he that believeth not, ſhall be damned.* Is it not here plainly ſuppoſed that the goſpel was accompanied with ſuch evidence, that no intelligent creature could reject it, but from an evil bias of heart, ſuch as would juſtly expoſe him to damnation? If it had been poſſible for an intelligent creature, after hearing the goſpel, to think Jeſus an impoſtor, and his doctrine a lie, without any

evil motive, or corrupt ſtate of mind; I deſire to know how the Lord of glory is to be acquitted of ſomething worſe than bigotry in making ſuch a declaration.

Becauſe the mere holding of an opinion, irreſpective of the motive or ſtate of mind in him that holds it, is neither good nor evil, it does not follow, that "all differences in modes "of worſhip may be only the different methods "by which different men are endeavouring to "honour and obey their common parent." The latter includes more than the former. The performance of worſhip contains more than the mere holding of an opinion: for it includes an exerciſe of the heart. Our Lord and his apoſtles did not proceed on any ſuch principle, when they went forth preaching the goſpel; as I hope hath been ſufficiently proved in the *Letter on candour*. The principles on which they proceeded were, *An aſſurance that they were of God, and that the whole world were lying in wickedneſs—That he who was of God would hear their words; and he that was not of God would not hear them—That he who believed their teſtimony, ſet to his ſeal that God was true; and he that believed it not, made God a liar.*

If we conſider a belief of the goſpel, in thoſe who hear it, as eſſential to ſalvation, we ſhall be called bigots: but, if this be bigotry,

Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles were bigots; and the ſame outcry might have been raiſed againſt them, by both jews and greeks, as is now raiſed againſt us. Jeſus Chriſt himſelf ſaid to the jews, *If ye believe not that I am he, ye ſhall die in your ſins:* and his apoſtles went forth with the ſame language. They wrote and preached that men *might believe that Jeſus was the Chriſt; and that, believing, they might have life through his name.* Thoſe who embraced their teſtimony, they treated as in a ſtate of ſalvation; and thoſe who rejected it were told, that they had *judged themſelves unworthy of everlaſting life.* In ſhort, they acted as men fully convinced of the truth of what their Lord had declared in their commiſſion; *He that believeth and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved; but he that believeth not, ſhall be damned.*

To all this an unbelieving *jew* might have objected, in that day, with quite as good a grace as ſocinians object in this: 'Theſe men 'think, that our ſalvation depends upon re-'ceiving their opinions! Have not we been 'the people of God, and in a ſtate of ſalvation, 'time out of mind, without believing that 'Jeſus of Nazareth was the Son of God? 'Our fathers believed only in general, that 'there was a Meſſiah to come; and were, no 'doubt, ſaved in that faith. We alſo believe 'the ſame, and worſhip the ſame God; and

'yet, according to theſe bigots, if we reject 'their opinion concerning Jeſus being 'the 'Meſſiah, we muſt be *judged unworthy of ever-* '*laſting life.*'

A *heathen* alſo, ſuppoſe one of Paul's hearers at Athens, who had juſt heard him deliver the diſcourſe at Mars-hill, (recorded in Acts xvii. 22—31) might have addreſſed his countrymen in ſome ſuch language as the following: 'This jewiſh ſtranger, Athenians, 'pretends to make known to us THE UNKNOWN GOD. Had he been able to make 'good his pretenſions, and had this been all, 'we might have been obliged to him. But 'this *unknown God*, it ſeems, is to take place 'of all others that are known, and be ſet up 'at their expenſe. You have hitherto, Athenians, acted worthy of yourſelves; you have 'liberally admitted all the gods to a participation of your worſhip: but now, it ſeems, 'the whole of your ſacred ſervices is to be 'engroſſed by one. You have never been uſed 'to put any reſtraint upon *thought*, or *opi-* '*nion*; but with the utmoſt freedom have 'ever been in ſearch of *new things*. But this 'man tells us WE OUGHT NOT TO THINK *that* 'the *Godhead is like unto ſilver or gold*, as 'though we were bound to adopt his manner 'of thinking and no other. You have been

'famed for your adoration of the gods; and 'to this even your accuſer himſelf has borne 'witneſs: yet he has the temerity to call us 'to *repentance* for it. It ſeems, then, we are 'conſidered in the light of *criminals*—crimi-'nals on account of our *devotions*—criminals 'for being *too* religious; and for adhering to 'the religion of our anceſtors! Will Atheni-'ans endure this? Had he poſſeſſed the *liberality* 'becoming one who ſhould addreſs an Athe-'nian audience, he would have ſuppoſed that, 'however we might have been hitherto miſ-'taken in our devotions, yet our intentions 'were good; and that "All the differences in "modes of worſhip, as practiſed by Jews and "Athenians, (who are equally, by his own "confeſſion, *the offspring of God)* may have "been only different methods, by which we "have been endeavouring to honour and "obey our common parent." 'Nor is this 'all: for we are called to repentance, BE-'CAUSE *this unknown God hath appointed a 'day in which he will judge the world, &c.* 'So, then, we are to renounce our princi-'ples and worſhip, and embrace his, on pain 'of being called to give an account of it 'before a divine tribunal. Future happineſs 'is to be confined to his ſect; and our eter-'nal welfare depends upon our embracing his 'opinions! Could your ears have been in-

'ſulted, Athenians, with an harangue more 'replete with "*pride, arrogance, and bigotry?*"

'But, to ſay no more of this inſulting lan-'guage, the *importance* he gives to his opi-'nions, if there were no other objection, muſt 'ever be a bar to their being received at 'Athens. You, Athenians, are friends to *free* 'enquiry. But ſhould our philoſophers turn 'chriſtians, inſtead of being famous, as here-'tofore, for the ſearch of *new truth*, they 'muſt ſink into a ſtate of mental ſtagnation. "Thoſe perſons who think that their ſalva-"tion depends upon holding their preſent "opinions, muſt neceſſarily entertain the great-"eſt dread of *free enquiry*. They muſt think "it to be hazarding of their eternal welfare, "to liſten to any arguments, or to read any "books, that favour of idolatry. It muſt ap-"pear to them in the ſame light as liſten-"ing to any other temptation, whereby they "would be in danger of being ſeduced to their "everlaſting deſtruction. This temper of mind "cannot but be a foundation for the moſt de-"plorable bigotry, obſtinacy, and ignorance."

'The Athenians, I doubt not, will gene-'rally abide by the religion of their forefa-'thers: but ſhould any individuals think of 'turning chriſtians, I truſt they will never 'adopt that illiberal principle of making their

'opinion neceſſary to future happineſs. While 'this man and his followers hold ſuch a no-'tion "of the *importance* of their preſent ſen-"timents, they muſt needs live in the dread "of all free enquiry; whereas we, who have "not that idea of the importance of our pre-"ſent ſentiments, preſerve a ſtate of mind pro-"per for the diſcuſſion of them. If we be "wrong, as our minds are under no ſtrong "bias, we are within the reach of conviction; "and thus are in the way to grow wiſer and "better as long as we live."

By the above it will appear, that the apoſtle Paul was juſt as liable as we are to the charge of bigotry. Thoſe parts which are marked with *double* reverſed commas, are, with only an alteration of the term *hereſy* to that of *idolatry*, the words of Dr. *Prieſtley* in the *Second Section* of his *Conſiderations on Differences of Opinions*. Judge, brethren, whether theſe words beſt fit the lips of a chriſtian miniſter, or of a heathen caviller. The conſequences alledged by the ſuppoſed athenian againſt Paul, are far from juſt, and might be eaſily refuted: but they are the ſame for ſubſtance as thoſe alledged by Dr. Prieſtley againſt us, and the premiſes from which they are drawn are exactly the ſame.

From the whole, I think, it may ſafely be concluded, if there be any ſentiments taught us

in the new teſtament in a clear and decided manner, this is one: That the apoſtles and primitive preachers conſidered the belief of the goſpel which they preached, as neceſſary to the ſalvation of thoſe who heard it.

But though it ſhould be allowed that a belief of the goſpel is neceſſary to ſalvation, it will ſtill be objected, That ſocinians believe the goſpel as well as others; their chriſtianity therefore ought not to be called in queſtion on this account. To this it is replied: If what ſocinians believe be indeed the goſpel; in other words, if it be not deficient in what is eſſential to the goſpel; they undoubtedly ought to be acknowledged as chriſtians: but if otherwiſe, they ought not. It has been pleaded by ſome, who are not ſocinians, that we ought to think favourably of all who profeſs to embrace chriſtianity *in general*, unleſs their conduct be manifeſtly immoral. But we have no ſuch criterion afforded us in the new teſtament; nor does it accord with what is there revealed. The new teſtament informs us of various *wolves in ſheep's cloathing*, who appeared among the primitive chriſtians; men who profeſſed the chriſtian name, but yet were in reality enemies to chriſtianity; who *perverted the goſpel of Chriſt*, and introduced *another goſpel* in its place.

But theſe men, it is ſaid, not only taught falſe doctrine, but led *immoral lives.* If by *immoral* be meant groſsly wicked, they certainly did not all of them anſwer to that character. The contrary is plainly ſuppoſed in the account of the falſe apoſtles among the Corinthians; who are called *deceitful workers, transforming themſelves into the apoſtles of Chriſt. And no marvel, for Satan himſelf is transformed into an angel of light: therefore it is no great thing if his miniſters alſo be transformed as the miniſters of righteouſneſs.** I would not here be underſtood as drawing a compariſon between the falſe apoſtles and the ſocinians. My deſign in this place, is not to inſinuate any ſpecific charge againſt them; but merely to prove, that if we judge favourably of the ſtate of every perſon who bears the chriſtian name, and whoſe exterior moral character is fair, we muſt judge contrary to the ſcriptures.

To talk of forming a favourable judgment from a profeſſion of chriſtianity *in general,* is as contrary to reaſon and common ſenſe, as it is to the new teſtament. Chriſtianity in general, muſt comprehend ſome of the leading particulars of it. Suppoſe a candidate for a ſeat in the Houſe of Commons, on being aſked his political principles, ſhould profeſs himſelf a

* 2 Cor. xi. 13—15.

friend to *liberty in general.* A freeholder enquires, 'Do you diſapprove, ſir, of taxation 'without repreſentation? No. Would you vote 'for a reform in parliament? No. Do you 'approve of the liberty of the preſs? No.' Would this afford ſatisfaction? Is it not common for men to admit that in the groſs which they deny in detail? The only queſtion that can fairly be urged is; Are the doctrines which ſocinians diſown, ſuppoſing them to be true, of ſuch importance, that a rejection of them would endanger their ſalvation?

It muſt be allowed, that theſe doctrines *may* be what we conſider them; not only true, but *eſſential* to chriſtianity. Chriſtianity, like every other ſyſtem of truth, muſt have ſome principles which are eſſential to it: and if thoſe in queſtion be ſuch, it cannot juſtly be imputed to pride, or bigotry; it cannot be uncharitable or uncandid, or indicate any want of benevolence, to think ſo. Neither can it be wrong to draw a natural and neceſſary concluſion, that thoſe perſons who reject theſe principles are not chriſtians. To think juſtly of perſons is, in no reſpect, inconſiſtent with a univerſal good-will towards them. It is not in the leaſt contrary to charity, to conſider unbelievers in the light in which the ſcriptures repreſent them; nor thoſe who reject what is eſſential to the goſpel, as rejecting the goſpel itſelf.

Dr. Prieſtley will not deny that chriſtianity has its *great truths*, though he will not allow the doctrines in queſtion to make any part of them. "The being of a God—his conſtant "over-ruling providence, and righteous moral "government—the divine origin of the jewiſh "and chriſtian revelations—that Chriſt was a "teacher ſent from God—that he is our maſter, "lawgiver, and judge—that God raiſed him from "the dead—that he is now exalted at the "right hand of God—that he will come again "to raiſe all the dead, and ſit in judgment "upon them—and that he will then give to "every one of us according to our works—"Theſe, (he ſays) are, properly ſpeaking, the "*only great truths of religion*; and to theſe "not only the *Church of England*, and the "*Church of Scotland*, but even the *Church of* "*Rome* gives its aſſent."* We ſee here, that Dr. Prieſtley not only allows that there are certain great truths of religion, but determines what, and what "only" they are. I do not recollect, however, that the falſe teachers in the churches of Galatia denied any one of theſe articles; and yet without rejecting ſome of the *great* and *eſſential* truths of chriſtianity, they could not have *perverted* the goſpel of Chriſt, or have introduced *another goſpel*.

* *Famil. Letters*, Letter XXII.

But Dr. Prieſtley, it ſeems, though he allows the above to be *great truths*, yet conſiders nothing as *eſſential* to chriſtianity, but *a belief of the divine miſſion of Chriſt*. "While "a man believes, (he ſays) in the divine miſ"ſion of Chriſt, he might with as much pro"priety be called a mahometan as be denied "to be a chriſtian."* To call ſocinians *mahometans*, might in moſt caſes be improper: they would ſtill, however, according to this criterion of chriſtianity, be within the pale of the church. For Mahomet himſelf, I ſuppoſe, never denied the divine miſſion of Chriſt; nor very few of thoſe doctrines which Dr. Prieſtley calls "the *only* great truths of religion." The doctor informs us, that "ſome people conſider him already as half a mahometan."† Whether this be juſt or unjuſt, according to *his* notions of chriſtianity, a mahometan is to be conſidered as more than half a chriſtian. He ought, if the above criterion be juſt, to be acknowledged as a fellow-chriſtian; and the whole party, inſtead of being ranked with heathenith and jewiſh unbelievers, as they are by this ſame writer,‡ ought to be conſidered as a ſect, or denomination of chriſtians. The doctor, therefore,

* *Conſider. on Differ. of Opin.* § V.

† *Pref. to Let. to Mr. Burn.*

‡ *Fam. Let.* Let. xvii Concluſion.

need not have ſtopped at the *Church of Rome*, but might have added the *Church of Conſtantinople*, as agreeing in his "only great truths of religion."

I ſcarcely need to draw the concluſion which follows from what has been obſerved.—If not only thoſe who *perverted the goſpel* among the Galatians, did, but even the *mahometans* may acknowledge thoſe truths which Dr. Prieſtley mentions, they cannot be the *only* great, much leſs the *diſtinguiſhing*, truths of the chriſtian religion.

The difference between ſocinians and calviniſts, is not about the mere circumſtantials of religion. It reſpects nothing leſs than the *rule* of faith, the *ground* of hope, and the *object* of worſhip. If the ſocinians be right, we are not only ſuperſtitious devotees, and deluded dependants upon an arm of fleſh,* but habitual idolaters. On the other hand, if we be right, they are guilty of refuſing to ſubject their faith to the deciſions of heaven; of rejecting the only way of ſalvation; and of ſacrilegiouſly depriving the Son of God of his eſſential glory. It is true, they do not deny our chriſtianity on account of our ſuppoſed idolatry; but no reaſon can be aſſigned for it, except

* Jer. xxvii. 5.

their indifference to religious truth, and the deiſtical turn of their ſentiments.

If the proper deity of Chriſt be a divine truth, it is a great and a fundamental truth in chriſtianity. Socinians, who reject it, very conſiſtently reject the worſhip of Chriſt with it. But worſhip enters into the eſſence of religion; and the worſhip of Chriſt, according to the new teſtament, into the eſſence of the chriſtian religion. The primitive chriſtians are characteriſed by, their *calling upon the name of the Lord Jeſus.* The apoſtle, when writing to the Corinthians, addreſſed himſelf *To the church of God at Corinth: to them that were ſanctified in Chriſt Jeſus; called to be ſaints; with all that in every place* CALLED UPON THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.* That this is deſigned as a deſcription of true chriſtians will not be denied; but this deſcription does not include ſocinians, ſeeing they call not upon the name of Chriſt. The concluſion is, ſoci-

* Mr. Lindsey's obſervation, that *Called upon the name of Chriſt*, ſhould be rendered, *Called by the name of Chriſt*, if applied to Rom. x. 13, would make the ſcriptures promiſe ſalvation to every one that is *called* a Chriſtian. Salvation is promiſed to all who *believe, love, fear,* and *call upon the name of the Lord;* but never are the poſſeſſors of it deſcribed by a mere accidental circumſtance, in which they are not voluntary, and in which, if they were, there is no virtue.

nians would not have been acknowledged by the apoſtle Paul as true chriſtians.

If the deity of Chriſt be a divine truth, it muſt be the Father's will, that all men ſhould honour the Son in the ſame ſenſe, and to the ſame degree, as they honour the Father; and thoſe who honour him not as God, will not only be found oppoſing the divine will, but are included in the number of thoſe who, by refuſing to honour the Son, *honour not the Father who hath ſent him:* which amounts to nothing leſs, than that the worſhip which they pay to the Father is unacceptable in his ſight.

If the deity of Chriſt be a divine truth, he is the object of *truſt;* and that not merely in the character of a witneſs, but as *Jehovah, in whom is everlaſting ſtrength.* This appears to be another characteriſtic of true chriſtians in the new teſtament. *In his name ſhall the gentiles truſt—I know whom I have truſted; and that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him—In whom ye alſo truſted after ye heard the word of truth, the goſpel of your ſalvation.** But if it be a characteriſtic of true chriſtianity ſo to truſt in Chriſt, as to commit the ſalvation of our ſouls into his hands: How can we conceive of thoſe as true

* Matt. xii. 21. 2 Tim. i. 12. Eph. i. 12, 13.

chriſtians, who conſider him only as a fellow-creature; and, conſequently place no ſuch confidence in him?

If then by nature be in a *loſt* and *periſhing* condition; and if Chriſt came to ſeek and ſave them under thoſe characters, as he himſelf conſtantly teſtified; then all thoſe that were whole in their own eyes, and ſeemed to need no phyſician, as the ſcribes and phariſees of old, muſt neceſſarily be excluded from an intereſt in his ſalvation. And in what other light can thoſe perſons be conſidered, who deny the depravity of their nature, and approach the Deity without reſpect to an atoning Saviour?—Further:

If the death of Chriſt, as an atoning ſacrifice, be the only way of a ſinner's ſalvation; if there be *No other name given under heaven, or among men, by which we muſt be ſaved;* if this be the *foundation which God hath laid in Zion,* and if no other will ſtand in the day of trial: How can we conceive that thoſe who deliberately diſown it, and renounce all dependance upon it for acceptance with God, ſhould yet be intereſted in it? Is it ſuppoſable, that they will partake of that *forgiveneſs of ſins,* which believers are ſaid to receive *for his ſake, and through his name,* who

refuſe to make uſe of that name in any of their petitions?

If the doctrine of atonement by the croſs of Chriſt be a divine truth, it conſtitutes the very ſubſtance of the goſpel; and, conſequently, is eſſential to it. The doctrine of the croſs is repreſented in the new teſtament as the grand peculiarity, and the principal glory of chriſtianity. It occupies a large proportion among the doctrines of ſcripture, and is expreſſed in a vaſt variety of language. Chriſt *was delivered for our offences, wounded for our tranſgreſſions, bruiſed for our iniquities—He died for our ſins—By his death purged our ſins*—is ſaid to *take* (or bear) *away the ſins of the world*—to have *made peace through the blood of his croſs—reconciled us to God by his death—redeemed us by his blood—waſhed us from our ſins in his own blood—by his own blood obtained eternal redemption for us—purchaſed his church by his own blood*, &c. &c. This kind of language is ſo interwoven with the doctrine of the new teſtament, that to explain away the one, is to ſubvert the other. The doctrine of the croſs is deſcribed as being, not merely an important branch of the goſpel, but *the goſpel itſelf. We preach Chriſt crucified; to the jews a ſtumbling block, and to the greeks fooliſhneſs: but to them that are*

called, both jews and greeks, Chriſt the power of God, and the wiſdom of God—I determined not to know any thing among you, ſave Jeſus Chriſt and him crucified—An *enemy to the croſs of Chriſt* is only another mode of deſcribing an enemy to the goſpel.* It was reckoned a ſufficient refutation of any principle, if it could be proved to involve in it the conſequence of Chriſt's having *died in vain*.† Chriſt's *dying for our ſins*, is not only declared to be a divine truth *according to the ſcriptures*, but a truth of ſuch importance, that the then *preſent ſtanding*, and the *final ſalvation* of the Corinthians, were ſuſpended upon their adherence to it.‡ In fine, the doctrine of the croſs is the central point in which all the lines of evangelical truth meet and are united. What the ſun is to the ſyſtem of nature, that the doctrine of the croſs is to the ſyſtem of the goſpel; it is the LIFE of it. The revolving planets might as well exiſt and keep their courſe without the attracting influence of the one, as a goſpel be exhibited worthy of the name that ſhould leave out the other.

I am aware that ſocinian writers do not allow the doctrine of the *atonement* to be ſignified by that of the *croſs*. They would tell you, that they believe in the doctrine of the

* 1 Cor. i. 23, 24. ii. 2. † Gal. ii. 21. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 1, 2, 3.

croſs; and allow it to have a *relative* or *ſubordinate* importance, rendering the truth of Chriſt's reſurrection more evident, by cutting off all pretence that he was not really dead.* Whether this meagre ſenſe of the phraſe will agree with the deſign of the apoſtle in this and various other paſſages in the new teſtament,—whether it contains a ſufficient ground for that ſingular *glorying* of which he ſpeaks, or any principle by which *the world was crucified to him, and he unto the world*,—let the impartial judge. But be this as it may, the queſtion here is not, whether the doctrine of atonement be ſignified by that of the croſs; but ſuppoſing it to be ſo, Whether it be of ſuch importance as to render a denial of it a virtual denial of chriſtianity?—Once more:

If we believe in the abſolute neceſſity of *regeneration*, or that a ſinner muſt be renewed in the ſpirit of his mind, or never enter the kingdom of God; in what light muſt we conſider thoſe who plead for a reformation only, and deny the doctrine of a ſupernatural divine influence, by which a *new heart is given us, and a new ſpirit is put within us?* Ought we, or can we conſider them as the ſubject of a divine change, who are continually ridiculing the very idea of it?

* Dr. Prieſtley's *Serm. on Glorying in the Croſs.*

It is common for our opponents to ſtigmatize us with the name of *bigots*. Bigotry, if I underſtand it, is a blind and inordinate attachment to one's opinions. If we be attached to principles on account of their being *our's*, or becauſe *we* have adopted them, rather than becauſe they appear to us to be taught in the holy ſcriptures; if we be attached to *ſome* peculiar principles to the neglect of *others*, or ſo as to give them a greater proportion in the ſyſtem than they require; if we conſider things as being of greater importance than the ſcriptures repreſent them; if we obſtinately adhere to our opinions, ſo as to be averſe to free enquiry, and not open to conviction; if we make ſo much of principles, as to be inattentive to holy practice; or if a difference in religious ſentiment deſtroy or damp our benevolence to the perſons of thoſe from whom we differ; in any of theſe caſes, we are ſubject to the charge of bigotry. But we may conſider a belief of certain doctrines as neceſſary to ſalvation, without coming under any part of the above deſcription. We may be attached to theſe doctrines, not becauſe we have already embraced them, but on account of their appearing to us to be revealed in the ſcriptures: we may give them only that degree of importance in our views of things, which they occupy there: we may

be ſo far friends to free enquiry, as impartially to ſearch the ſcriptures to ſee whether theſe things be true; and ſo open to conviction as to relinquiſh our ſentiments, when they are proved to be unſcriptural. We may be equally attached to practical godlineſs, as to the principles on which it is founded; and notwithſtanding our ill opinion of the religious ſentiments of men, and our apprehenſions of the danger of their condition, we may yet bear good-will to their perſons, and wiſh for nothing more than an opportunity of promoting their welfare, both for this life and that which is to come.

I do not pretend that calviniſts are free from bigotry; neither are their opponents. What I here contend for, is, That their conſidering a belief of certain doctrines as neceſſary to ſalvation, unleſs it can be proved that they make more of theſe doctrines than the ſcriptures make of them, ought not to ſubject them to ſuch a charge.

What is there of bigotry in our not reckoning the ſocinians to be chriſtians, more than in their reckoning us *idolaters?* Mr. Madan complained of the ſocinians "inſulting thoſe of his principles with the charge of idolatry." Dr. Prieſtley juſtified them by obſerving, "All who believe Chriſt to be a

"man and not God, muſt neceſſarily *think* "it idolatrous to pay him divine honours; "and to *call* it ſo, is no other than the "neceſſary conſequence of avowing our belief." Nay, he repreſents it as ridiculous, that they ſhould "be allowed to think the trinitarians "idolaters, without being permitted to call "them ſo."* If ſocinians have a right to think trinitarians idolaters, they have doubtleſs a right to call them ſo; and, if they be able, to make it appear ſo: nor ought we to conſider ourſelves as inſulted by it. I have no idea of being offended with any man, in affairs of this kind, for ſpeaking what he believes to be the truth. Inſtead of courting compliments from each other, in matters of ſuch moment, we ought to encourage an unreſervedneſs of expreſſion, provided it be accompanied with ſobriety and benevolence. But neither ought ſocinians to complain of our refuſing to acknowledge them as chriſtians, or to impute it to a ſpirit of bigotry; for it amounts to nothing more than avowing a neceſſary conſequence of our belief. If we believe the deity and atonement of Chriſt to be eſſential to chriſtianity, we muſt neceſſarily think thoſe who reject theſe doctrines to be no chriſtians; nor is it inconſiſtent with charity to ſpeak accordingly.

* *Fam. Letters*, Lett. VI.

Again: What is there of bigotry in our not allowing the ſocinians to be chriſtians, more than in their not allowing us to be *unitarians?* We profeſs to believe in the divine unity, as much as they do in chriſtianity. But they conſider a oneneſs of perſon, as well as of eſſence, to be eſſential to the unity of God; and, therefore, cannot acknowledge us as unitarians: and we conſider the deity and atonement of Chriſt as eſſential to chriſtianity; and, therefore, cannot acknowledge them as chriſtians. *We* do not chooſe to call ſocinians unitarians, becauſe that would be a virtual acknowledgement that we ourſelves do not believe in the divine unity: but we are not offended at what they think of us; nor do we impute it to bigotry, or to any thing of the kind. We know that, while they think as they do on the doctrine of the trinity, our ſentiments muſt appear to them as tritheiſm. We comfort ourſelves in theſe matters with this, that the thoughts of creatures, uninſpired of God, are liable to miſtake. Such are their's concerning us, and ſuch are our's concerning them; and if ſocinians do indeed *love our Lord Jeſus Chriſt in ſincerity,* it is happy for them. The judgement of their fellow-creatures cannot affect their ſtate: and thouſands who have ſcrupled to admit them among the true followers of Chriſt in this world, would

rejoice to find themſelves miſtaken in that matter at the laſt day.

It has been pleaded by ſome, who are not ſocinians, that a belief in the doctrine of the atonement is not neceſſary to ſalvation. They obſerve, That the diſciples of our Lord, previous to his death, do not appear to have embraced the idea of a vicarious ſacrifice; and therefore conclude, that a belief in a vicarious ſacrifice is not of the eſſence of faith. They add, It was owing to prejudice, and conſequently wrong, for the diſciples to diſbelieve this doctrine, and admit the ſame thing with reſpect to ſocinians; yet as the error in the one caſe did not endanger their ſalvation, they ſuppoſe it may not do ſo in the other. To this objection the following obſervations are offered in reply.

Firſt: Thoſe who object in this manner do not ſuppoſe the diſciples of Chriſt to have agreed with ſocinians in any of their peculiar ſentiments, except the rejection of a *vicarious ſacrifice.* They allow them to have believed in the doctrine of human depravity, divine influence, the miraculous conception, the pre-exiſtence and proper deity of Chriſt, the inſpiration of the ſcriptures, &c. The caſe of the diſciples, therefore, is far from being parallel with that of the ſocinians

Secondly: Whatever were the ignorance and error which occupied the minds of the diſciples relative to the death of their Lord, their caſe will not apply to that of ſocinians, on account of the difference in the ſtate of revelation, as it ſtood before and after that event. Were it even allowed that the diſciples did reject the doctrine of Chriſt's being a vicarious ſacrifice; yet the circumſtances which they were under, render their caſe very different from our's. We can perceive a conſiderable difference between rejecting a principle before, and after, a full diſcuſſion of it. It would be a far greater evil, in the preſent day; to perſecute men for adhering to the dictates of their conſciences, than it was before the rights of conſcience were ſo fully underſtood. It may include a thouſand degrees more guilt for this country, at the preſent time, to perſiſt in the ſlave-trade, than to have done the ſame thing previous to the late enquiry on that buſineſs. But the diſparity between periods with regard to the light thrown upon theſe ſubjects, is much leſs than between the periods before and after the death of Chriſt, with regard to the light thrown upon that ſubject. The difference between the periods, before and after the death of Chriſt, was as great as between a period in which a prophecy is unaccompliſhed, and that in which it is accompliſhed. There are many things that [illegible]

plain in prophecy when the event is paſt, which cannot then be honeſtly denied; and it may ſeem wonderful that they ſhould ever have been overlooked or miſtaken; yet overlooked, or miſtaken they have been, and that by men of ſolid underſtanding and real piety.

It was after the death of Chriſt, when the means of knowledge began to diffuse light around them, that the diſciples were for the firſt time reproved for their *ſlowneſs of heart to believe*, in reference to this ſubject. It was after the death and reſurrection of Chriſt, when the way of ſalvation was fully and clearly pointed out, that thoſe who ſtumbled at the doctrine of the croſs were reckoned *diſobedient*, in ſuch a degree as to denominate them unbelievers, and that the moſt awful warnings and threatenings were pointed againſt them, as *treading underfoot the blood of the Son of God.* It is true, our Lord had repeatedly predicted his death, and it was faulty in the diſciples not to underſtand and believe it; yet what he taught on that ſubject was but little, when compared with what followed. The *great ſalvation*, as the apoſtle to the Hebrews expreſſes it, *firſt began to be ſpoken by the Lord*, and was *confirmed* to the primitive chriſtians *by thoſe who heard him:* but then it is added, *God alſo bearing them witneſs, both with*

ſigns and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, according to his own will. Now, it is upon this accumulation of evidence that he aſks, *How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation!**

A belief in the *reſurrection* of Chriſt is allowed on all hands to be eſſential to ſalvation; as it is an event, upon which the truth of chriſtianity reſts.† But the diſciples of Chriſt, previous to the event, were as much in the dark on this article as on that of the atonement. Even to the laſt, when he was actually riſen from the dead, they viſited his tomb in hope of finding him, and could ſcarcely believe their ſenſes with reſpect to his having left it: *for as yet they knew not the ſcripture that he muſt riſe again from the dead.* Now if the reſurrection of Chriſt, though but little underſtood before the event, may after it be conſidered as eſſential to chriſtianity; there is no reaſon to conclude but that the ſame may be ſaid of his atonement.

Thirdly: It is not clear that the diſciples did reject the doctrine of a vicarious ſacrifice. They had all their lives been accuſtomed to vicarious ſacrifices: it is, therefore, very improbable, that they ſhould be prejudiced againſt the idea itſelf. Their objection to Chriſt's laying down

* Heb. ii. 1—4. † 1 Cor. xiv. 14, 15. Rom. x. 9.

his life, ſeems to have been directed ſimply againſt his *dying*, rather than againſt his dying as a *vicarious* ſacrifice. Could they have been reconciled to the former, for any thing that appears, they would have readily acquieſced in the latter. Their objection to the death of Chriſt ſeems to have been more the effect of ignorance and miſguided affection, than of a rooted oppoſition of principle: and, therefore, when they came to ſee clearly into the deſign of his death, it is expreſſed not as if they had eſſentially altered their ſentiments, but *remembered the words which he had ſpoken to them;* of which, while their minds were beclouded with the notions of a temporal kingdom, they could form no clear or conſiſtent ideas, and therefore had forgotten them.*

And notwithſtanding the ignorance and error which attended the diſciples, there are things ſaid of them which imply much more than the objection would ſeem to allow:—*Whither I go,* ſaith Chriſt, *ye know, and the way ye know.* As if he ſhould ſay, I am not going to a ſtrange place, but to the houſe of my Father and of your Father; with the way to which you are acquainted, and therefore will ſoon be with me. *Thomas ſaid unto him, Lord, we know not whi-*

* Luke xxvi. 6—8.

*ther thou goeſt, and how can we know the way? Jeſus ſaid unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me—If ye had known me, ye ſhould have known my Father alſo: and from henceforth ye know him, and have ſeen him.** From this paſſage it appears, that the diſciples had a *general* idea of ſalvation through Chriſt; though they did not underſtand *particularly* how it was to be accomplished. Farther; Chriſt taught his hearers, ſaying, *Except ye eat my fleſh and drink my blood, ye have no life in you—and the bread that I will give is my fleſh, that I will give for the life of the world.* On this occaſion many of his nominal diſciples were offended, and *walked no more with him;* but the true diſciples were not offended. On the contrary, being aſked, *Will ye alſo go away? Peter anſwered, Lord, to whom ſhall we go? Thou haſt the words of eternal life.*† From this paſſage it plainly appears, that the true diſciples of Chriſt were even at that time conſidered as believing ſo much on the ſubject of Chriſt, giving himſelf for the life of the world, as to *eat his fleſh and drink his blood;* for our Lord certainly did not mean to condemn them as having *no life in them.* So far were they from *rejecting* this doctrine, that the very words at which the falſe

* John vi. 6. † John vi. 51-68.

diſciples were offended, were to them *the words of eternal life.* Probably this great truth was ſometimes more, and ſometimes leſs apparent to their view. At thoſe periods in which their minds were occupied with the notion of a temporal Kingdom, or in which events turned up contrary to their expectations, they would be all in darkneſs concerning it; yet, with all their darkneſs, and with all their doubts, it does not appear to be a doctrine which they can be ſaid to have *rejected.*

No perſon, I think, who is open to conviction can be a bigot, whatever be his religious ſentiments. Our opponents, it is true, are very ready to ſuppoſe that this is our general character, and that we are averſe to free enquiry; but this may be more than they are able to prove. We acknowledge that we do not chooſe to circulate books indiſcriminately among our friends, which are conſidered by us as containing falſe and pernicious doctrines; neither do other people. I never knew a zealous diſſenter eager to circulate a book containing high-church principles among his children and connections; nor a churchman thoſe which contain the true principles of diſſent. In like manner, an anti-trinitarian will not propagate the beſt productions of trinitarians. If they happen to meet with a weak performance, in which the ſubject is treated to diſadvantage,

they may feel no great objection to make it public; but it is otherwiſe with reſpect to thoſe in which it is treated to advantage. I have known ſome gentlemen affecting to poſſeſs what has been called a liberal mind, who have diſcovered no kind of concern at the indiſcriminate circulation of ſocinian productions; but I have alſo perceived that thoſe gentlemen have not been far from their kingdom of heaven. If any perſon chooſe to read the writings of a ſocinian, or of an atheiſt, he is at liberty to do ſo; but as the *Monthly Reviewers* themſelves obſerve, "Though "we are always ready to engage in enquiries af- "ter truth, and wiſh to ſee them at all times "promoted; yet we chuſe to avoid diſſeminating "notions which we cannot approve."*

As to being open to conviction *yourſelves*, it has been frequently obſerved, that ſocinians diſcover as great an averſion to the reading of our writings, as we can diſcover to the reading of theirs. Some will read them; but not many. Out of a hundred perſons, whoſe minds lean towards the ſocinian ſyſtem, ſhould you put into their hands a well-written calviniſtic performance, and deſire them carefully and ſeriouſly to read it over, I queſtion whether five would comply with your requeſt. So far however as my obſervation extends, I can perceive in ſuch per-

* *Month. Rev. Enlarged*, Vol. vi. page 555.

ſons an eagerneſs for reading thoſe writings which ſuit their taſte, and a contempt of others, equal, if not ſuperior, to what is perceivable in people of other denominations.

Dr. Prieſtley ſuggeſts, that the importance which we give to our ſentiments tends to prevent an earneſt and impartial ſearch after truth. "While they imbibe ſuch a notion of their preſent ſentiments, they muſt needs (he ſays) live in the dread of all free enquiry; whereas we, who have not that idea of the importance of our preſent ſentiments, preſerve a ſtate of mind proper for the diſcuſſion of them. If we be wrong, as our minds are under no ſtrong bias, we are within the reach of conviction; and thus are in the way to grow wiſer and better as long as we live."*

Mr. Belſham, however, appears to think the very reverſe. He pleads, and I think very juſtly, that an idea of the non-importance of ſentiment tends to deſtroy a ſpirit of enquiry, by becalming the mind into a ſtate of indifference and careleſſneſs. He complains of thoſe of his own party (the ſocinians) who maintain that "Sincerity is every thing, that nothing is of much value but an honeſt heart, and that ſpeculative opinions, the cant name for thoſe in-

* *Conſider. on Differ. of Opin.* § II.

" tereſting doctrines, which the wiſe and good
" in every age have thought worthy of the moſt
" ſerious diſcuſſion, that theſe ſpeculative opi-
" nions, as they are opprobriouſly called, are of
" little uſe. What is this, (adds he) but to paſs
" a ſevere cenſure upon thoſe illuſtrious names,
" whoſe acute and learned labours have been
" ſucceſsfully employed in clearing up the diffi-
" culties in which theſe important ſubjects were
" involved, to condemn their own conduct in
" waſting ſo much of their time and pains upon
" ſuch uſeleſs ſpeculations, and to check the
" progreſs of religious enquiry and chriſtian
" knowledge? Were I a friend to the popular
" maxim, That ſpeculative opinions are of no
" importance, I would endeavour to act conſiſt-
" ent with my principles: I would content my-
" ſelf with believing as my fathers believed;
" I would take no pains to acquire or diffuſe
" knowledge; I would laugh at every attempt
" to inſtruct and to meliorate the world; I would
" treat as a viſionary and a fool every one who
" ſhould aim to extend the limits of ſcience; I
" would recommend to my fellow-creatures that
" they ſhould neither lie nor defraud, that they
" ſhould neither ſwear falſely nor ſteal, ſhould
" ſay their prayers as they have been taught;
" but, as to any thing elſe, that they need not
" give themſelves any concern; for that honeſty

" was every thing, and that every expectation " of improving their circumſtances, by cultivat- " ing their underſtandings and extending their " views, would prove deluſive and chimerical."*

None will imagine that I have quoted Mr. Belſham on account of my agreement with him in the great principles of the goſpel. What he would reckon important truth, I ſhould conſider as pernicious error; and, probably, his views of the importance of what he accounts truth, are not equal to what I have attempted to maintain. But in this general principle we are agreed: *That our conceiving of truth as being of but little importance, has a tendency to check free enquiry rather than promote it:* which is the reverſe of what we are taught by Dr. Prieſtley.

To illuſtrate the ſubject more fully: Suppoſe the poſſeſſion of a precious ſtone, of a certain deſcription, to entitle us to the poſſeſſion of ſome very deſirable object; and ſuppoſe that none of any other deſcription would anſwer the ſame end; Would that conſideration tend to prejudice our minds in favour of *any* ſtone we might happen to poſſeſs, or prevent an impartial and ſtrict enquiry into its properties? Would it not rather induce us to be more inquiſitive and careful, leſt we ſhould be miſtaken, and ſo loſe the prize?

* *Sermon on the Importance of Truth*, pp. 5, 6.

If, on the other hand, we could imagine, that any ſtone would anſwer the ſame end, or that an error in that matter were of trifling importance as to the iſſue, would it not have a tendency to promote a ſpirit of careleſſneſs in our examinations; and as all men are apt in ſuch caſes to be prejudiced in favour of what they already have, to make us reſt contented with what we had in poſſeſſion; be it what it might?

It is allowed, however, that as every good has its counterfeit, and as there is a mixture of human prejudices and paſſions in all we think or do, there is danger of this principle degenerating into an unchriſtian ſeverity; and of its being exerciſed at the expenſe of that benevolence which is due to all men. There is nothing however, in this view of things, which in its own nature tends to promote theſe evils: for the moſt unfavourable opinion of a man's principles and ſtate, may conſiſt with the moſt perfect benevolence and compaſſion towards his perſon. Jeſus Chriſt thought as ill of the principles and ſtate of the phariſees and ſadducees, and the generality of the jewiſh nation, as any of us think of one another; yet he wept over Jeruſalem, and to his laſt hour fought her welfare. The apoſtle Paul had the ſame conception of the principles and ſtate of the generality of his countrymen as Chriſt himſelf had, and much the ſame

as we have of the ſocinians. He conſidered them, though they *followed after the law of righteouſneſs*, or were very devout in their way, yet as *not having attained to the law of righteouſneſs*; in other words, as not being *righteous* perſons; which the Gentiles, who ſubmitted to the goſpel, were. And *wherefore? Becauſe they ſought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law? For they ſtumbled at that ſtumbling ſtone.** Yet Paul in the ſame chapter, and in the moſt ſolemn manner, declared, that he had *great heavineſs, and continual ſorrow in his heart*—Nay, that *he could wiſh himſelf accurſed from Chriſt, for his brethren's ſake, his kinſmen according to the fleſh!*

But why need I ſay any more? Dr. Prieſtley himſelf allows all I plead for: "The man "(ſays he) whoſe ſole ſpring of action is *a concern for loſt ſouls*, and a care to preſerve the "purity of that goſpel which alone teaches the "moſt effectual method of their recovery from "*the power of ſin and ſatan unto God*, will feel "an ardour of mind that will prompt him ſtrenuouſly to oppoſe all thoſe whom he conſiders as obſtructing his benevolent deſigns. (He "adds) I could overlook every thing in a man "who, I thought, meant nothing but my everlaſting welfare."† This, and nothing elſe, is

* Rom. ix. 30—32. † *Diſſert. on Opin.* § 1.

the temper of mind which I have been endeavouring to defend; and, as Dr. Prieſtley has here generouſly acknowledged its propriety, it becomes us to acknowledge, on the other hand, that every ſpecies of zeal for ſentiments, in which a concern for the everlaſting welfare of men is wanting, is an unhallowed kind of fire; for which whoever indulges it, will receive no thanks from Him, whoſe cauſe they may imagine themſelves to have eſpouſed.

I am, &c.

LETTER XI.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR INFLUENCE IN PROMOTING THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

Chriſtian Brethren,

IF the holy ſcriptures be a proper medium by which to judge of the nature of virtue, it muſt be allowed to include *the love of Chriſt:* nay, that love to Chriſt is one of the cardinal virtues of the chriſtian ſcheme; ſeeing it occupies a moſt important place in the doctrines and precepts of inſpiration. *He that loveth me,* ſaid Chriſt, *ſhall be loved of my Father —If God were your Father, ye would love me—*

* *On Differ. in Opin.* § 1.

*Whom having not ſeen, ye love; in whom though now ye ſee him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unſpeakable and full of glory—Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jeſus Chriſt in ſincerity—If any man love not the Lord Jesus Chriſt, let him be anathema maranatha.**

From theſe paſſages, with many others that might be produced, we may conclude that love to Chriſt is not only a chriſtian virtue, but eſſential to the very exiſtence of chriſtianity; nay, to *morality* itſelf, if by that term be meant a conformity to the moral law. The following lines, though expreſſed by a poet, contain more than a poetic flight, even the words of truth and ſoberneſs:

"Talk they of Morals? Oh thou bleeding Love,
"The grand morality is love of Thee!"

YOUNG.

In judging which of the ſyſtems in queſtion is moſt adapted to promote love to Chriſt, it ſhould ſeem ſufficient to determine, Which of them tends moſt to exalt his character—which places his mediation in the moſt important light—and which repreſents us as moſt indebted to his undertaking.

With reſpect to the *firſt:* Every Being commands our affection, in proportion to the degree

* John xiv. 21. viii. 42. 1 Pet. i. 8. Eph. vi. 24. 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

of intellect which he poſſeſſes; provided that his goodneſs be equal to his intelligence. We feel a reſpect towards an animal, and a concern at its death, which we do not feel towards a vegetable; towards thoſe animals which are very ſagacious, more than thoſe which are otherwiſe; towards man, more than to mere animals; and towards men of enlarged powers, if they be but good as well as great, more than to men in common. According to the degree of intellect which they poſſeſs, ſo much they have of Being, and of eſtimation in the ſcale of Being. A man is of *more value than many ſparrows*, and the life of David was reckoned to be worth ten thouſand of thoſe of the common people. It has been thought to be on this principle that God, poſſeſſing infinitely more exiſtence than all the creatures taken together, and being as good as he is great, is to be loved and revered without bounds, except thoſe which ariſe from the limitation of our powers; that is, *with all our heart, and ſoul, and mind, and ſtrength.*

Now, if theſe obſervations be juſt, it cannot be doubted which of the ſyſtems in queſtion tends moſt to promote the love of Chriſt: that which ſuppoſes him to be equal, or one with God; or that which reduces him to the rank of a mere fellow-creature. In the ſame proportion as God himſelf is to be loved above man, ſo is Chriſt to

be loved, ſuppoſing him to be truly God, above what he is, or ought to be, ſuppoſing him to be merely a fellow-man.

The prophets, apoſtles, and primitive chriſtians, ſeem to have felt this motive in all its force. Hence, in their various expreſſions of love to Chriſt, they frequently mingle acknowledgements of his divine dignity and excellency. They, indeed, never ſeem afraid of going too far, or of honouring him too much; but dwell upon the dignity and glory of his perſon, as their darling theme. When David meditated upon this ſubject, he was raiſed above himſelf. *My heart*, ſaith he, *is inditing a good matter: I ſpeak of the things which I have made touching the King: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men—Thy throne*, O GOD, *is for ever and ever: the ſceptre of thy kingdom is a right ſceptre—Gird thy ſword upon thy thigh*, O MOST MIGHTY, *with thy glory and thy majeſty.* The expected Meſſiah was frequently the ſubject of Iſaiah's prophecies. He loved him; and his love appears to have been founded on his dignity and divine excellency. *Unto us a child is born; unto us a ſon is given; and the government ſhall be upon his ſhoulders; and his name ſhall be called Wonderful, Counſellor*, THE MIGHTY GOD, *the everlaſting Father, the Prince of peace.* He thus deſcribes the preaching of

John the baptiſt: *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderneſs, Prepare ye the way of* JEHOVAH, *make ſtraight in the deſart a high way for* OUR GOD *—Behold the* LORD GOD *will come with a ſtrong hand, and his arm ſhall rule for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.* HE *ſhall feed his flock like a ſhepherd:* HE *ſhall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his boſom, and ſhall gently lead thoſe that are with young.*—Zacharias, the father of John the Baptiſt, ſo loved the Meſſiah as to rejoice in his own child chiefly becauſe he was appointed to be his prophet and forerunner. *And thou, child,* ſaid the enraptured parent, *ſhalt be called the prophet of* THE HIGHEST: *for thou ſhalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.** John the Baptiſt himſelf, when the Jews artfully endeavoured to excite his jealouſy on account of the ſuperior miniſterial ſucceſs of Chriſt, replied; *Ye yourſelves bear me witneſs that I ſaid I am not the Chriſt*—HE THAT COMETH FROM ABOVE IS ABOVE ALL: *he that is of the earth is earthly, and ſpeaketh of the earth:* HE THAT COMETH FROM HEAVEN IS ABOVE ALL.†

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* Pſal. xlv. 1—6. Iſai. ix. 6. xl. 3, 10, 11. Luke i. 76.

† John iii. 28—31. Query, In what ſenſe could Chriſt be ſaid to come from *above*, even from *heaven*, if he was merely a man, and came into the world like other men? It could not be on account of his *office*, or of receiving his miſſion from God; for, in that ſenſe, John was from

The apoſtles, who ſaw the Lord, and who ſaw the accompliſhment of what the prophets foretold, were not diſappointed in him. Their love to him was great, and their repreſentations of his perſon and character ran in the ſame exalted ſtrain. *In the beginning was the Word*, ſaid the beloved diſciple, *and the Word was with God, and the word* WAS GOD. *The ſame was in the beginning with God. All things* WERE MADE BY HIM, AND WITHOUT HIM WAS NOT ANY THING MADE THAT WAS MADE. *He was in the world, and* THE WORLD WAS MADE BY HIM, *and the world knew him not. And the Word was made fleſh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of* THE ONLY BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER) *full of grace and truth.*—Thomas inſiſted upon an unreaſonable kind of evidence of the reſurrection of his Lord from the dead; ſaying, *Except I ſhall ſee in his hands the print of the nails, and put my fingers into the print of the nails, and thruſt my hands into his ſide, I will not believe.* When reproved, by our Lord's offering to gratify him in his incredulous propoſal, he confeſſed, with a mixture

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heaven as well as he. Was it not for the ſame reaſon which John elſewhere gives for his being *preferred before him*; viz. that HE WAS BEFORE HIM? John i. 15, 30.

of ſhame, grief, and affection, that however unbelieving he had been, he was now ſatisfied that it was indeed his Lord, and no other, ſaying, MY LORD AND MY GOD!—The whole Epiſtle to the Hebrews breathes an ardent love to Chriſt, and is intermingled with the ſame kind of language. Jeſus is there repreſented as UPHOLDING ALL THINGS BY THE WORD OF HIS POWER: as the object of ANGELIC ADORATION: as he to whom it was ſaid, THY THRONE, O GOD, IS FOR EVER AND EVER: as he who LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH, and concerning whom it is added, THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORK OF THINE HANDS: as ſuperior to Moſes, the one being the BUILDER *and* OWNER *of the houſe*, even GOD *that built all things*; and the other, only a ſervant in it: as ſuperior to Aaron and to all thoſe of his order, A GREAT *high prieſt*, *Jeſus* THE SON OF GOD: and finally, as infinitely ſuperior to angels; for, *to which of the angels, ſaid he at any time*, THOU ART MY SON? or, SIT ON MY RIGHT HAND? Hence the goſpel is conſidered as exhibiting A GREAT *ſalvation*; and thoſe who *neglect* it, are expoſed to a recompenſe of wrath which they *ſhall not eſcape*.*

* John i. 1, 2, 3, 14. xx. 24—28. Heb. i. 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13. iii. 3, 4, 5, 6. iv. 14. ii. 3.

Paul could ſcarcely mention the name of Chriſt, without adding ſome ſtrong encomium or other in his praiſe. When he was enumerating thoſe things which rendered his countrymen dear to him, he mentions their being *Iſraelites*, to whom pertained the *adoption*, and the *glory*, and the *covenants*, and the *giving of the law*, and the *ſervice of God*, and the *promiſes*; whoſe were the *fathers*, and of whom, as concerning the fleſh, *Chriſt came*. Here, it ſeems, he might have ſtopped; but, having mentioned the name of Chriſt, he could not content himſelf without adding, WHO IS OVER ALL, GOD BLESSED FOR EVER. *Amen*. Having occaſion alſo to ſpeak of him in his Epiſtle to the Coloſſians, as *God's dear Son, in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveneſs of ſins;* he could not forbear adding, *Who is the image of the inviſible God, the firſt-born of every creature. For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, viſible and inviſible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created* BY *him, and* FOR *him: and he is before all things, and by him all things conſiſt!**

* Rom. ix. 4, 5. Col. i. 13—17.

And now, brethren, I might appeal to you on the juſtneſs of Dr. Prieſtley's aſſertion, that "In no ſenſe whatever, not even in the "loweſt of all, is Chriſt ſo much as called "*God* in all the new teſtament."* I might appeal to you, whether ſuch language as the above would ever have proceeded from the ſacred writers, had they embraced the ſcheme of our opponents. But, waving theſe particulars as irrelative to the immediate point in hand, I appeal to you whether ſuch love as the prophets and apoſtles expreſſed towards Chriſt, could conſiſt with his being merely a fellow-creature, and their conſidering him as ſuch; whether the manner in which they expreſſed that love, upon the principles of our opponents, inſtead of being acceptable to God, could have been any other than the height of extravagance, and the eſſence of idolatry? Judge alſo for yourſelves, brethren, which of the ſyſtems in queſtion has the greateſt tendency to promote ſuch a ſpirit of love to Chriſt as is here exemplified: that which leads us to admire theſe repreſentations, and on various occaſions to adopt the ſame expreſſions; or that which employs us in coldly criticiſing away their meaning: that which leads us without fear to give them their full ſcope; or that

* *Letters to Mr. Burn*, Let. I.

which, while we are honouring the Son, would excite apprehenſions leſt we ſhould in ſo doing diſhonour the Father?

The next queſtion to be diſcuſſed is, *Which the two ſyſtems places the mediation of Chriſt in the moſt important point of light?* That ſyſtem, doubtleſs, which finds the greateſt *uſe* for Chriſt, or in which he occupies the *moſt important place*, muſt have the greateſt tendency to promote love to him. Suppoſe a ſyſtem of politics were drawn up, in which *civil liberty* occupied but a very ſmall portion, and was generally kept out of view; or if, when brought forward, it was either for the purpoſe of abating the high notions which ſome people entertain of it, or at leaſt, of treating it as a matter not abſolutely neceſſary to good civil government; who would venture to aſſert, that ſuch a ſyſtem was friendly, or its abettors friends, to civil liberty? This is manifeſtly a caſe in point. The ſocinian ſyſtem has but little uſe for Chriſt; and none at all, as an atoning ſacrifice. It ſcarcely ever mentions him, unleſs it be to depreciate thoſe views of his dignity which others entertain; or in ſuch a way as to ſet aſide the abſolute neceſſity of his mediation.

It is not ſo in our views of things. We find ſo much uſe for Chriſt, if I may ſo ſpeak, that he appears as the *ſoul* which animates the

whole body of our divinity; as the centre of the ſyſtem, diffuſing light and life to every part of it. Take away CHRIST; nay, take away the deity and atonement of Chriſt, and the whole ceremonial of the old teſtament appears to us little more than a dead maſs of unintereſting matter: prophecy loſes almoſt all that is intereſting and endearing; the goſpel is annihilated, or ceaſes to be that *good news* to loſt ſinners which it profeſſes to be; practical religion is diveſted of its moſt powerful motives; the evangelical diſpenſation of its peculiar glory; and heaven itſelf of its moſt tranſporting joys.

'The ſacred penmen appear to have written all along upon the ſame principles. They conſidered CHRIST as the *All in all* of their religion; and, as ſuch, they loved him with their whole hearts. Do they ſpeak of the *firſt tabernacle?* They call it a *figure for the time then preſent, in which were offered both gifts and ſacrifices, that could not make him that did the ſervice perfect as pertaining to the conſcience—But* CHRIST *being come a High Prieſt of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to ſay, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.* Do they ſpeak of prophecy? They call

the testimony of Jesus the *spirit* of it. Of the gospel? It is the doctrine of *Christ crucified.* Of the medium by which the world was crucified to them, and they to the world? It is the same. The very *reproach of Christ* had a value stamped upon it, so as, in their esteem, to surpass all the treasures of the present world. One of the most affecting ideas which they afford us of heaven, consists in ascribing everlasting glory and dominion *to him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. Ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands* were heard *with a loud voice, saying,* WORTHY IS THE LAMB THAT WAS SLAIN, TO RECEIVE POWER, AND RICHES, AND WISDOM, AND STRENGTH, AND HONOUR, AND GLORY, AND BLESSING![*]

Let us select a particular instance in the character of Paul. This apostle seemed to be swallowed up in love to Christ. His mercy to him as one of the *chief of sinners,* had bound his heart to him with bonds of everlasting gratitude. Nor was this all; he saw that glory in his person, office, and work, which eclipsed the excellence of all created objects, which crucified the world to him, and him unto the world. *What things were gain to me, those I counted*

[*] Heb. ix. 9—11. Rev. xix. 10. 1 Cor. i. 23. Gal. vi. 14. Heb. xi. 26. Rev. v. 11, 12.

loſs for Chriſt. Yea, doubtleſs, and I count all things but loſs for the excellency of the knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus my Lord; for whom I have ſuffered the loſs of all things. Nor did he now repent; for he immediately adds, *And do count them but dung that I may win Chriſt, and be found in him; not having mine own righteouſneſs which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Chriſt, the righteouſneſs which is of God by faith—That I may know him, and the power of his reſurrection, and the fellowſhip of his ſufferings, being made conformable unto his death.* When his friends wept becauſe he would not be diſſuaded from going up to Jeruſalem, he anſwered, *What mean ye to weep, and to break mine heart? For I am ready, not to be bound only, but alſo to die at Jeruſalem,* FOR THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS! Feeling in himſelf an ardent love to Chriſt, he vehemently deſired that others might love him too. *For this cauſe he bowed his knees to the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt* in behalf of the Epheſians; praying that CHRIST *might dwell in their hearts by faith.* He repreſented him to them as the medium of all ſpiritual bleſſings; of *election, adoption, acceptance with God, redemption,* and *the forgiveneſs of ſins;* of a future *inheritance,* and of a preſent *earneſt of it;* as *Head over all things to the church,* and as *him that* FILL-

ETH ALL IN ALL. He deſcribed him as the only way of *acceſs to God*, and as the ſole *foundation* of a ſinner's hope; whoſe *riches were unſearchable*, and the dimenſions of his love *paſſing knowledge.**

If any drew back, or deviated from the ſimplicity of the goſpel, he felt a moſt ardent thirſt for their recovery: witneſs his Epiſtle to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and (if, as is generally ſuppoſed, he was the writer of it) to the Hebrews. If any one drew back, and were not to be reclaimed, he denounced againſt him the divine declaration, *My ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in him?* And whatever might be the mind of others, like Joſhua, he was at a point himſelf: *Henceforth*, he exclaims, *let no man trouble me; for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jeſus.* If he wiſhed to *live*, it was for Chriſt; or, if to *die*, it was to be with him. He invoked the beſt of bleſſings on thoſe who loved the Lord Jeſus Chriſt in ſincerity; and denounced an *anathema maranatha* on thoſe who loved him not.†

The reaſon why I have quoted all theſe paſſages is, to ſhow that the primitive goſpel was *full of Chriſt;* or, that Chriſt was, as it

* Phil. iii. 7.—10. Acts. xxi. 13. Eph. Ch. i, ii, iii.
† Heb. x. 38. Gal. vi. 17. Phil. i. 20, 21. Eph. vi. 24. 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

were, the centre and the life of the evangelical ſyſtem; and that this, its leading and principal characteriſtic, tended wonderfully to promote the love of Chriſt. Now, brethren, let me appeal to you again: Which of the ſyſtems in queſtion is it, which reſembles that of the apoſtles in this particular, and conſequently has the greateſt tendency to promote love to Chriſt? That of which Chriſt is the *All in all;* or that in which he is ſcarcely ever introduced, except for the purpoſe of repreſenting him as a "mere fellow-creature, a fallible and peccable man?"

The *Third,* and laſt queſtion to be diſcuſſed, (if, indeed, it need any diſcuſſion) is, *Which of the two ſyſtems repreſents us as moſt indebted to Chriſt's undertaking?* Our Lord himſelf has laid it down as an incontrovertible rule, that *thoſe who have much forgiven, will love him much; and that thoſe who have little forgiven, will love him but little.* That ſyſtem, therefore, which ſuppoſes us the greateſt debtors to forgiving love, muſt needs have the greateſt tendency to promote a return of love.

Our views with reſpect to *the depravity of human nature* are ſuch, that, upon our ſyſtem, we have much more to be forgiven, than our opponents have upon theirs. We ſuppoſe ourſelves to have been utterly depraved; our very nature totally corrupted; and, conſequently,

that all our ſuppoſed virtues, while our hearts were at enmity with God, were not virtue in reality, but deſtitute of its very eſſence. We do not, therefore, conceive of ourſelves, during our unregeneracy, as having been merely *ſtained* by a few *imperfections;* but as *altogether polluted,* by a courſe of apoſtaſy from God, and black rebellion againſt him. That which is called *ſin,* by our opponents, muſt conſiſt chiefly, if not entirely, in the irregularity of a man's outward conduct; elſe they could not ſuppoſe, as Dr. Prieſtley does, that "Virtue bears the ſame "proportion to vice that happineſs does to "miſery, or health to ſickneſs, in the world."* That is, that there is much more of the former than of the latter. But the merely outward irregularities of men bear no more proportion to the whole of their depravity, according to our views of it, than the particles of water which are occaſionally emitted from the ſurface of the ocean, to the tide that rolls beneath. The religion of thoſe who make ſin to conſiſt in little beſides exterior irregularities, or who conceive of the virtues of men as greatly exceeding their vices, appears to us to reſemble the religion of Paul, previous to his converſion to Chriſtianity. While he thought of nothing but the irregularities of his exterior conduct, his

* *Let. to a Phil. Unb.* Vol. I. Let. V.

virtues, doubtleſs, appeared to him to outweigh his vices; and, therefore, he concluded all was well; that he was in a fair way to everlaſting happineſs; or, as he himſelf expreſſes it, *alive without the law.* But when, through the glaſs of that divine *commandment* which prohibits the very inclination to evil, he ſaw the corruption that reigned within, tranſgreſſion aſſumed a very different appearance: It was then a mighty ocean, that ſwelled, and ſwept off all his legal hopes. *Sin revived, and he died.* In ſhort, our views of human depravity induce us to conſider ourſelves, by nature, as *unworthy;* as *loſt*, and *ready to periſh:* ſo that if we are ſaved at all, it muſt be by rich grace, and by a great Saviour. I ſcarcely need to draw the concluſion, That, having, according to our ſyſtem, moſt to be forgiven; we ſhall, if we truly enter into it, love moſt.

Further: Our ſyſtem ſuppoſes a much greater malignity in ſin, than that of our opponents. When we ſpeak of ſin, we do not love to deal, as Mr. Belſham does, in extenuating names. We find no authority for calling it "human frailty;" or for affixing any idea to it that ſhall repreſent us rather as objects worthy of the compaſſion of God, than as ſubjects of that which his ſoul abhorreth. We do not ſee how Mr. Belſham, or thoſe of his

ſentiments, while they ſpeak of moral evil in ſo diminutive a ſtyle, can poſſibly conceive of it after the manner of the inſpired writers, as an *evil and bitter thing;* or, as it is expreſſed in that remarkable phraſe of the apoſtle Paul, *exceeding ſinful.* *

Our opponents deny ſin to be in any ſenſe an infinite evil; or, which is the ſame thing, deſerving of endleſs puniſhment; or that ſuch puniſhment will follow upon it. Nobody, indeed, ſuppoſes that ſin is *in all reſpects* infinite. As committed by a finite creature, and admitting of different degrees, it muſt be finite, and will doubtleſs be puniſhed hereafter with different degrees of puniſhment; but, as committed againſt a God of infinite excellence, and as tending to infinite anarchy and miſchief, it muſt be infinite. All that is meant, I ſuppoſe,

* The expression, *exceeding sinful*, is very forcible. It resembles the phrase, *far more exceeding*, or rather, *excessively exceeding*, in 2 Cor. iv. 7. It seems that the holy Spirit himself could not find a worse name for sin than its own. If we spek of a treacherous person we call him a *Judas:* if of Judas, we call him a *devil;* but if of satan, we want a comparison, because we can find none that is worse than himself. We must therefore say as Christ did, *When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own.* It was thus with the apostle when speaking of the evil of his own heart, *That sin by the commandment* might become—what? He wanted a name worse than its own—he could not find one—he therefore unites a strong epithet to the thing itself, calling it *exceeding sinful.*

by calling ſin an infinite evil, is, that it is deſerving of endleſs puniſhment; and this can never be fairly objected to as an abſurdity. If there be no abſurdity in the immortality of a ſinner's exiſtence, there is none in ſuppoſing him to deſerve a puniſhment, be it in what degree it may, that ſhall run commenſurate with it. There is no abſurdity in ſuppoſing a ſinner to have been guilty of ſuch crimes as to deſerve miſery for as long a duration as he is capable of ſuſtaining it. But whatever may be ſaid, as to the truth or falſehood of this ſentiment, thus much is clear, that in proportion as our opponents conceive diminutively of the evil of ſin, they diminiſh the grace of forgiveneſs; and if that forgiveneſs come to us through Chriſt (as is plainly implied in their loving *him* moſt who have moſt forgiven) it muſt needs follow, that in the ſame proportion the love of Chriſt is ſapped at the foundation.

Once more: The *expenſe* at which we ſuppoſe our forgiveneſs to have been obtained, is a conſideration which endears to us both the gift and the giver. We do not conceive of Chriſt, in his beſtowment of this bleſſing upon us, as preſenting us with that which coſt him nothing. If the portion given by Jacob to his ſon Joſeph was heightened and endeared by its being obtained *by the ſword and the bow*;

much more is a title to eternal life, by its being obtained through the death of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. It is this that attracts the hearts of thoſe who are deſcribed as ſinging a new ſong to their Redeemer, *Thou waſt ſlain, and haſt redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.*

It does not appear, from any thing I have ſeen, that the ſyſtem of our opponents can, with any plauſibility, be pretended to equal ours reſpecting love to Chriſt. All that can be alledged, with any colour of reaſon, all however, that I have noticed, is this; That in proportion as we, in this way, furniſh motives of love to Chriſt, we detract from thoſe of love to the Father, by diminiſhing the freeneſs of his grace, and exhibiting him as one that was incapable of beſtowing forgiveneſs, unleſs a price was paid for it. To this it is replied: If the incapacity of the Father, to ſhew mercy without an atonement, conſiſted in a want of love, or any thing of natural implacability, or even a reluctance to the beſtowment of mercy, there would be force in the objection: but if it be no other than the incapacity of a righteous governor, who, whatever good will he may have to the offender, cannot bear the thought of paſſing over the offence without ſome public expreſſion of diſpleaſure againſt it; that while mercy tri-

umphs, it may not be at the expenſe of law, of equity, and of the general good; ſuch an incapacity rather infers a perfection than an imperfection in his nature, and inſtead of diminiſhing our regard for his character, muſt have a powerful tendency to increaſe it.

I am &c.

LETTER XII.

ON VENERATION FOR THE SCRIPTURES.

Chriſtian Brethren,

IF we may judge of the nature of true piety, by the examples of the prophets and holy men of old, we may conclude, with certainty, that an affectionate attachment to the Holy Scriptures, as the rule of faith and practice, enters deeply into the ſpirit of it. The holy ſcriptures were deſcribed by David, under the names of the *word, ſtatutes, laws, precepts, judgments,* and *teſtimonies* of God; and to theſe, all through the Pſalms, eſpecially in the 119th, he profeſſes a moſt ardent attachment. Such language as the following was very common with him, as well as others of the old teſtament writers; *Oh how I love thy law!—Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path—Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law—My ſoul*

breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times—Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart—Thy ſtatutes have been my ſong in the houſe of my pilgrimage—The law of thy mouth is better to me than thouſands of gold and ſilver.

Dr. Prieſtley often profeſſes great regard for the ſacred writings, and is very ſevere on Mr. *Burn*, for ſuggeſting that he denied "the "infallibility of the apoſtolic teſtimony, concern- "ing the perſon of Chriſt." He alſo tells Dr. *Price*, "No man can pay a higher regard to "*proper* ſcripture authority than I do." We may therefore take it for granted, that a regard for the authority of ſcripture is a virtue; a virtue that our opponents, as well as we, would be thought to poſſeſs.

I wiſh in this Letter to enquire, ſuppoſing the ſacred writers to have been honeſt and good men, What a regard to the *proper* authority of their writings includes, and to compare it with the avowed ſentiments of our adverſaries. By theſe means, brethren, you may be the better able to judge for yourſelves, whether the ſpirit which animates the whole body of the ſocinian trinity does not breathe a language unfriendly to the ſacred writings, and carry in it ſomething

hoſtile to *every thought being ſubdued to the obedience of Chriſt.*

In order to judge of a regard for proper ſcriptural authority, it is neceſſary in the firſt place, to have recourſe to the *profeſſions* of the ſacred writers concerning what they wrote. If any man venerate the authority of ſcripture, he muſt receive it as BEING WHAT IT PROFESSES TO BE, AND FOR ALL THE PURPOSES FOR WHICH IT PROFESESS TO BE WRITTEN. If the ſcriptures profeſs to be divinely inſpired, and aſſume to be the infallible ſtandard of faith and practice, we muſt either receive them as ſuch; or, if we would be conſiſtent, diſown the writers as impoſtors.

The profeſſions of the ſacred writers are as follow: *The ſpirit of the Lord ſpake by me, and his word was in my tongue: the God of Iſrael ſaid, the Rock of Iſrael ſpake to me—Thus ſaith the Lord—And Jehoſhaphat ſtood, and ſaid, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jeruſalem, Believe in the Lord your God, ſo ſhall ye be eſtabliſhed; believe his prophets, ſo ſhall ye proſper.**

New teſtament writers bear ample teſtimony to the inſpiration of thoſe under the old teſtament. *All ſcripture is given by inſpiration of God; and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof,*

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 2, 3. Iſai. xliii. 1. 2 Chron. xx. 20.

for correction, for inſtruction in righteouſneſs; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furniſhed unto all good works—No prophecy of the ſcripture is of private interpretation—it is not to be conſidered as the private opinion of a fallible man, as is the caſe with other productions—*for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God ſpake as they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt.**

Nor did the new-teſtament writers bear teſtimony to the inſpiration of the prophets only, but conſidered *their own writings* as equally inſpired: *If any man think himſelf to be a prophet, or ſpiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.* Peter ranks the epiſtles of Paul with *other ſcriptures.*† There ſeems to have been one inſtance in which Paul diſowned his having received any *commandment from the Lord*, and in which he proceeded to give his own private *judgment:*‡ but this appears to have been a particular exception from a general rule, of which notice was expreſsly given; an exception, therefore, which tends to ſtrengthen rather than weaken the argument for apoſtolic inſpiration.

* 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. 2 Pet. i. 20, 21. † 1 Cor. xiv. 37. 2 Pet. iii. 16. ‡ 1 Cor. vii. 25.

As the ſacred writers conſidered themſelves as divinely inſpired, ſo they repreſented their writings as the infallible teſt of divine truth, to which all appeals were to be made, and by which every controverſy in religious matters was to be decided. *To the law, and to the teſtimony; if they ſpeak not according to this rule, it is becauſe there is no light in them—Theſe are the true ſayings of God—That which is noted in the ſcriptures of truth—What ſaith the ſcriptures?—Search the ſcriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which teſtify of me—The Bereans ſearched the ſcriptures daily whether thoſe things were ſo.**

The ſacred writers did not ſpare to denounce the moſt awful judgments againſt thoſe who ſhould either pervert their writings, add to them, or detract from them. Thoſe who wreſted the apoſtolic epiſtles, are ſaid to have *wreſted them, as they did the other ſcriptures, to their own deſtruction—Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other goſpel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let them be accurſed—Whatever thing I command you, obſerve and do it; thou ſhalt not add thereto, nor diminiſh from it—If any man ſhall*

* Iſai. viii. 20. Rev. xix. 9. Dan. x. 21. Rom. iv. 3. John v. 39. Acts xvii. 11.

*add unto theſe things, God ſhall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man ſhall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God ſhall take away his part out of the book of life.**—Nothing ſhort of the moſt perfect divine inſpiration could juſtify ſuch language as this, or ſecure thoſe who uſed it from the charge of bold preſumption and baſe impoſition.

Dr. Prieſtley often profeſſes great regard for the ſcriptures; and, as has been obſerved before, is very ſevere on Mr. Burn, for repreſenting him as denying "the infallibility of the "apoſtolic teſtimony concerning the perſon of "Chriſt." Far be it from me to wiſh to repreſent the ſentiments of Dr. Prieſtley in an unfair manner, or in ſuch a light as he himſelf could juſtly diſavow. All I mean to do, is, to quote a paſſage or two from his own writings, and add a few remarks upon them.

Speaking in favour of reverence for the ſacred writings, he ſays, "Not that I conſider "the books of ſcripture as *inſpired*, and on that "account entitled to this high degree of reſ-"pect, but as authentic records of the diſpenſa-"tions of God to mankind, with every parti-

* 2 Pet. iii. 16. Gal. i. 8. Deut. xii. 23. Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

" cular of which we cannot be too well ac-
" quainted."

Again: " If you wiſh to know what, in my
" opinion, a chriſtian is bound to believe with
" reſpect to the *ſcriptures*, I anſwer, that the
" books which are univerſally received as *au-*
" *thentic*, are to be conſidered as faithful re-
" cords of paſt tranſactions, and eſpecially the
" account of the intercourſe which the Divine
" Being has kept up with mankind from the
" beginning of the world to the time of our
" Saviour, and his apoſtles. No chriſtian is an-
" ſwerable for more than this. The writers of
" the books of ſcripture were *men*, and there-
" fore *fallible;* but all that we have to do with
" them is in the character of *hiſtorians* and *wit-*
" *neſſes* of what they heard and ſaw. Of courſe
" their credibility is to be eſtimated like that of
" other hiſtorians; viz. from the circumſtances
" in which they wrote, as with reſpect to their
" opportunities of knowing the truth of what
" they relate, and the biaſſes to which they
" might be ſubject. Like all other hiſtorians,
" they were liable to miſtakes, with reſpect to
" things of ſmall moment, becauſe they might
" not give ſufficient attention to them; and
" with reſpect to their *reaſoning*, we are fully
" at liberty to judge of it as well as that of any
" other men, by a due conſideration of the pro-

" poſitions they advance, and the arguments " they allege. For it by no means follows, be- " cauſe a man has had communications with the " Deity for certain purpoſes, and he may be " depended upon with reſpect to his account of " thoſe communications, that he is in other reſ- " pects more wiſe and knowing than other " men."*

" You ſay, (ſays he, in his *Letters to Dr. Price*) That I do not allow of ſcriptural au- " thority; but, indeed, my friend, you ſhould " have expreſſed yourſelf with more caution. " No man can pay a higher regard to *proper* " ſcriptural authority, than I do; but neither I, " nor, I preſume, yourſelf, believe implicitly " every thing that is advanced by any writer in " the Old or New Teſtament. I believe all " the writers, without exception, to have been " men of the greateſt probity, and to have " been well informed of every thing of con- " ſequence of which they treat; but at the " ſame time I believe them to have been *men*, " and conſequently *fallible*, and liable to miſ- " take with reſpect to things to which they " had not given much attention, or concern- " ing which they had not the means of exact " information; which I take to be the caſe " with reſpect to the account that Moſes has

* *Lett. to a Phil. Unb. Part* II. *pref.* p. xiii. also Let. V.

"given of the creation and the fall of man." In a late performance, entitled, *Letters to the Philoſophers and Politicians of France*, Dr. Prieſtley ſpeaks much in the ſame ſtrain. "That the books of ſcripture (he ſays) were "written by particular divine inſpiration, "is a thing to which the writers them-"ſelves make no pretenſions. It is a notion "deſtitute of all proof, and that has done "great injury to the evidence of chriſti-"anity."*

From this account, taken all together, you will obſerve, brethren, that Dr. Prieſtley does not believe either the old or the new teſtament to be *divinely inſpired;* to be ſo inſpired as that he is "bound implicitly to be-"lieve every thing (and might he not have "added, *any thing?*) which the writers of "thoſe books advance." He believes, that the ſcriptures, inſtead of being *the rule of faith and practice*, are only "faithful records "of paſt tranſactions:" and that no authority attends them, except what attends the writings of any other honeſt and well informed hiſtorian; nor even that, in many caſes: for he maintains, that "no chriſtian is bound and "ſider any of the books of ſcripture fully of any the pro-

* Page 38.

"faithful records of paſt tranſactions, unleſs "they have been, *univerſally* received as au- "thentic." That is, if any perſon, at leaſt any conſiderable number of perſons, at any period, have thought proper to diſpute the authenticity of any of theſe writings, that part immediately ceaſes to have any claim upon poſterity, and may be rejected with impunity. And even thoſe writers, whoſe works upon the whole are allowed as authentic, are ſuppoſed to have written upon ſubjects "to "which they had not given much attention, "and concerning which they were not poſ- "ſeſſed of ſufficient means of information;" and, conſequently, in thoſe caſes are not to be regarded. This is the whole of what he means by "*proper* ſcriptural authority." This is the ground on which, while he ſpeaks of the ſacred writers as *fallible*, he, nevertheleſs, maintains the infallibility of their teſtimony concerning the perſon of Chriſt. He does not pretend to ſay the apoſtles were inſpired in that article, though not in others; but merely that this was a caſe in which, by the mere "ing [illegible] of their ſenſes, they were competent "[illegible]e, and even certain of deciding right. "infor[illegible] theſe notions of *proper* ſcriptural au- "with [illegible] will accord with the foregoing *pro-*

* *Lett. t*[illegible] I leave you to judge; alſo, if Dr. [illegible]'s views be right, whether the ſacred

writers, profeſſing what they did, could be men of the "greateſt probity."

You will obſerve further, that the fallibility which Dr. Prieſtley imputes to the ſacred writers, as being *men*, muſt reſt upon this principle: That it is impoſſible for God himſelf to inſpire a *man* as to preſerve him from error, without deſtroying his nature; and as he conſiders Chriſt as a mere *man*, perhaps it is on this principle that he maintains him to be "fallible and peccable." Yet he has never been able to produce one example in which he has actually failed. But it ſhould ſeem very extraordinary for a fallible and peccable man to go through the world in ſuch a manner, that his worſt enemies could not convict him of a ſingle failure, nor accuſe him of any ſin. If this matter be capable of proof, let Dr. Prieſtley prove it. Though the Jews declined the challenge, yet it is poſſible that he may poſſeſs ſufficient "magnanimity" to accept it.*

Further: You will obſerve that the *infallibility* which Dr. Prieſtley aſcribes to the apoſtolic teſtimony concerning the perſon of Chriſt, implies that every hiſtorian is infallible in ſimilar circumſtances. His reaſoning ſuppoſes, that if

* When Dr. Priestley charges the Mosaic history of the creation and fall of man with being a *lame account*, it was imputed to his *magnanimity*.

a ſenſible and upright hiſtorian have the proper means of information, and pay attention to his ſubject, he is infallible: but is this a fact? It certainly has not been uſual for us to conſider hiſtorians in this light. We commonly ſuppoſe, that amidſt the moſt ample means of information and the greateſt attention, that uninſpired men (who all have their prejudices and imperfections) are ever known to pay to a ſubject, they are liable to miſtakes. Dr. Prieſtley has written a treatiſe in which he has declared for the doctrine of *Materialiſm;* and, I ſuppoſe, he would be thought to have paid attention to it, and to have poſſeſſed the means of information as far as the nature of the ſubject will admit; yet, I imagine, he does not pretend in that article to infallibility.

If it be objected, that the nature of the ſubjects is different, and that the apoſtles were capable of arriving to a greater degree of certainty concerning the perſon of Chriſt, than Dr. Prieſtley could obtain on the ſubject of materialiſm; I anſwer, This appears to me to be more eaſily aſſerted than proved. Dr Prieſtley, indeed, tells us, "They were as capable of judg-"ing whether he was a *man*, as whether John "the Baptiſt was one." This is very true; and if the queſtion were, *Whether he was a man;* it might be to the purpoſe. But at this time of

day, however ſome of the humble followers of Dr. Prieſtley may amuſe themſelves in circulating pamphlets, proving that Jeſus Chriſt was a man, and that with a view to convert the Trinitarians; yet he himſelf cannot be inſenſible, that a materialiſt might with juſt as much propriety gravely go about to prove that men have material bodies.* Suppoſing Chriſt to have been merely a man, this was a matter that could not be viſible to the eyes of the apoſtles. How could they judge by his exterior appearance whether he was merely a man, or both God and man? The auguſt perſonages that appeared to Abraham, to Lot, and to Jacob, are called *men;* nor was there any thing, that we know of, in their exterior appearance, different from other men; yet it does not follow from hence that they were merely human. God, in the above inſtances, aſſumed the appearance of a man; and how could the diſciples be certain that all this might not be preparatory to his

* When ſocinian writers have produced a liſt of texts, which prove the proper humanity of Chriſt, they ſeem to think their work is done. Our writers reply; We never queſtioned his humanity. If you attempt to prove any thing, prove to us that he was *merely* human.—Here our opponents, feeling themſelves pinched, it ſhould ſeem, for want of evidence, have been known to loſe their temper. It is on this occaſion that Mr. Lindſey is reduced to the neceſſity of *abuſing* and *inſulting* his opponents, inſtead of anſwering their arguments. *Catechiſt. Enquiry* VI. quoted towards the latter end of Let. VIII.

becoming really incarnate? It is true, our Lord might have told them that he was merely a man, and, in that caſe, they might have been ſaid to be certain of it; but if ſo, it was either in ſome private inſtructions, or elſe in the words which they have recorded in their writings. We cannot ſay it was impoſſible for the apoſtles to miſtake reſpecting the perſon of Chriſt, owing to their private inſtructions; becauſe that would be building upon a foundation, of which we are confeſſedly ignorant: neither can we affirm it on account of any of thoſe words of Chriſt to his diſciples which are *recorded;* for we have thoſe words as well as they; and it might as well be ſaid of us as of them, that "it is impoſſible for us to be under any miſtake upon the ſubject." We might as well, therefore, allow what Dr. Prieſtley ſays to be infallible on the queſtion, whether men have ſouls, or not, as what the apoſtles ſay (if we give up their inſpiration) on the queſtion, whether Chriſt was divine, or not; for the one is as much an object of the ſenſes as the other.

I cannot conceive of any foundation for the above aſſertion, unleſs it be upon the ſuppoſition of a union of the divine and human natures being *in itſelf impoſſible.* Then, indeed, if we ſuppoſe the apoſtles knew it to be ſo, by knowing him to be a *man*, they muſt have

known him to be a *mere* man. But if a union of the divine and human natures be in itself impoſſible, that impoſſibility might as well appear to Dr. Prieſtley as to the apoſtles, if they were uninſpired; and he might as well maintain the infallibility of his own notions, relative to the perſon of Chriſt, as of theirs.

In fine: Let Dr. Prieſtley view the ſubject in what light he may, if he deny the divine inſpiration of the apoſtles, he will never be able to maintain their infallibility on any ground but what would equally infer his own.

When Mr. Burn charged Dr. Prieſtley with denying the infallibility of the apoſtolic teſtimony, he principally founds his charge on what the Doctor had written in a miſcellaneous work called, *The Theological Repoſitory:* in which he maintained, that "ſome texts of the old teſta-"ment had been improperly quoted by wri-"ters in the new;" who, it ſeems, were ſometimes "miſled by jewiſh prejudices."* Mr. Burn inferred, that if they were miſled in their application of one text, they were *liable* to the ſame thing in others; and that, if ſo, we could have no ſecurity whatever for their proper application of any paſſage, or of any thing like *infallibility* attending their teſtimony. One would

* *Letters I. II. to Mr. Burn.*

think this is not the moſt inconcluſive mode of reaſoning that ever was adopted: and how does Dr. Prieſtley refute it? He replies, "It does not follow, becauſe I ſuppoſe the apoſtles to have been fallible in *ſome* things, "that they were therefore fallible in all." He contends that he always conſidered them as infallible, *in what reſpects the perſon of Chriſt;* as a proof of which, he alleges his always having "appealed to their teſtimony, as being willing to be decided by it." And yet, we generally ſuppoſe a ſingle failure proves a writer fallible, as really as a thouſand; and, as to his appealing to their teſtimony, and being willing to be decided by it, we generally appeal to the beſt evidence we can obtain, and muſt be decided by it. But this does not prove that we conſider that evidence as *infallible.* Dr. Prieſtley has appealed to the *Fathers:* yet he will hardly pretend that their teſtimony is infallible; or, that they were incapable of contradicting either themſelves, or one another, even in thoſe matters concerning which the appeal is made. If he will, however, he muſt ſuppoſe them to have differed very widely from writers of a later date. Where is the hiſtorian who has written upon the opinions or characters of a body of men, even of thoſe of his own times, but who is liable and likely, in ſome particulars,

to be contradicted by other hiſtorians of the ſame period, and equally reſpectable?*

To be ſure, if Dr. Prieſtley thinks proper to declare, that he believes the apoſtles, uninſpired as they were, to have been infallible when they applied paſſages of the old teſtament *to the perſon of Chriſt;* and that, notwithſtanding their being fallible, and miſled by jewiſh prejudices in their application of paſſages on other ſubjects, nobody has a right to ſay he does not. Thus much may be ſaid, however, that he will find it no very eaſy taſk to prove himſelf in this matter a *rational chriſtian.* If the apoſtles are to be conſidered as uninſpired, and were actually miſled by jewiſh prejudices in their application of ſome old-teſtament paſſages, it will require no ſmall degree of labour to convince people in general that we can have any ſecurity for their not being ſo in others.

Mr. Burn, with a view to illuſtrate his argument, ſuppoſed an example; viz. the application of Pſal. xlv. 6. to Chriſt, in Heb. i. 8. He obſerves, that according to the foregoing hypotheſis, "there is no dependance to be placed "upon the argument; becauſe the apoſtle, in

* See this truth more fully illuſtrated in a *Letter of Dr. Edward Williams to Dr. Prieſtley,* prefixed to his *Abridgement of Dr. Owen on the Hebrews.*

" his application of this ſcripture to the Meſ-
" ſiah, *was miſled by a prejudice common among*
" *the jews, reſpecting this, and other paſſages in*
" *the old teſtament.*" Mr. Burn does not mean to ſay, that Dr. Prieſtley *had in this manner actually rejected the argument from* Heb. i. 8: but barely that, according to his hypotheſis, *he might do ſo*: He preſerves the *principle* of his opponent's objection, as he himſelf expreſſes it; but does not mean to aſſert that he had applied that principle to this particular paſſage. And how does Dr. Prieſtley reply to this? Why, by alleging that he *had not* applied the above principle to the paſſage in queſtion; but had given it a ſenſe which allowed the propriety of its being applied to Chriſt. That is, he had not made that uſe of a principle which might be made of it, and which no one aſſerted he had made of it. Dr. Prieſtley is, doubtleſs, poſſeſſed of great abilities, and has had large experience in controverſial writing: to what a ſituation, then, muſt he have been reduced, to have recourſe to ſuch an anſwer as the above!

The queſtion between Mr. Burn and Dr. Prieſtley, if I underſtand it, is not, Whether the latter appealed to the ſcriptures for the truth of his opinions; but, Whether his ſuppoſing the ſacred writers in ſome caſes to apply ſcripture improperly, does not render that appeal incon-

ſiſtent? Not whether he had allowed the propriety of the apoſtle's quoting the ſixth verſe of the forty-fifth Pſalm, and applying it in the firſt chapter of the Hebrews to Chriſt: but, Whether, upon the principle of the ſacred writers being liable to make, and having actually made, ſome improper quotations, he *might not* have diſallowed it? Not, whether the apoſtles did actually fail in this or that particular ſubject; but, Whether, if they failed in ſome inſtances, they were not *liable* to fail in others; and, whether any dependance could be placed on their deciſions? Not, whether the apoſtles teſtified *things which they had ſeen and heard from the beginning*; but, Whether their *infallibility* can be ſupported merely upon that ground, without ſuppoſing that the holy Spirit aſſiſted their memories, guided their judgments, and ſuperintended their productions? If the reader of that controverſy keep the above points in view, he will eaſily perceive the futility of a great many of Dr. Prieſtley's anſwers, notwithſtanding all his poſitivity and triumph, and his proceeding to admoniſh Mr. Burn to repentance.

Dr. Prieſtley, in his *Sixth Letter* to Mr. Burn, denies that he makes *the reaſon of the individual the ſole umpire in matters of faith.* But if the ſacred writers "in ſome things which "they advanced, were fallible, and miſled by "prejudice;" what dependance can be placed

upon them? Whether the reaſon of the individual be a proper umpire in matters of faith, or not; the writings of the apoſtles, on the foregoing hypotheſis, can make no ſuch pretence. Dr. Prieſtley may allege, that we muſt diſtinguiſh between thoſe things to which the apoſtles had not given much attention, and other things to which they had; thoſe in which they were prejudiced, and others in which they were unprejudiced; thoſe concerning which they had not the means of exact information, and others of a different deſcription: but can he himſelf, at this diſtance of time, or even if he had been contemporary with them, always tell what thoſe caſes are? How, in many inſtances at leaſt, can he judge with any certainty of the degree of attention which they gave to things; of the prejudiced, or unprejudiced ſtate of their minds; or, of the means of information which they poſſeſſed? Or, if *he* could decide with ſatisfaction to himſelf on theſe matters, How are the bulk of mankind to judge, who are not poſſeſſed of his powers and opportunities, but who are equally intereſted in the affair with himſelf? Are they implicitly to rely on his opinion; or, to ſupplicate heaven for a new revelation to point out the defects and errors of the old one? In ſhort, let Dr. Prieſtley profeſs what regard he may for the ſcriptures, if what he ad-

vances be true, *they* can be no proper teſt of truth; and if the reaſon of the individual be not the ſole umpire in theſe matters, there can be no umpire at all; but all muſt be left in gloomy doubt, and dreadful uncertainty.*

The generality of ſocinian writers, as well as Dr. Prieſtley, write degradingly of our only rule of faith. The ſcriptures profeſs to be *profitable for* DOCTRINE; *and to be able to make men wiſe unto ſalvation. The teſtimony of the Lord is* ſaid to be *ſure, making wiſe the ſimple:* and thoſe who made it their ſtudy, profeſſed to have obtained *more underſtanding than all their teachers.* But Mr. LINDSEY conſiders the ſcriptures as unadapted to promote any high perfection in knowledge; and ſuppoſes that they are left in obſcurity, with deſign to promote an occaſion of charity, candour, and forbearance. Speaking of the doctrine of the perſon of Chriſt, "Surely it muſt be owned (he ſays) to have "been left in ſome obſcurity in the ſcriptures "themſelves, which might miſlead readers, full "of heathen prejudices, (otherwiſe ſo many "men, wiſe and good, would not have differ-"ed, and ſtill continue to differ, concerning

* The reader will obſerve, that the foregoing remarks on the controverſy between Mr. Burn and Dr. Prieſtley, have nothing to do with that part of it which relates to the Riots at Birmingham, but merely with that on *the perſon of Chriſt.*

" it) and ſo left, it ſhould ſeem, on purpoſe " to whet human induſtry, and the ſpirit of en- " quiry into the things of God, to give ſcope " for the exerciſe of men's charity and mu- " tual forbearance of one another, and to be " one great means of cultivating the moral diſ- " poſitions; which is plainly the deſign of the " holy Spirit of God in the chriſtian revelation, " and not any high perfection in knowledge " which ſo few can attain."*

On this extraordinary paſſage, one might enquire, Firſt, If the ſcriptures have left the ſubject in obſcurity, why might not the miſtake of thoſe who hold the divinity of Chriſt (ſuppoſing them to be miſtaken) have been accounted for, without alleging, as Mr. Lindſey elſewhere does, that, "they are determined, at all events, to be- " lieve Chriſt to be a different Being from what " he really was—that there is no reaſoning with " them—and that they are to be pitied, and con- " ſidered as being under a debility of mind, in " this reſpect, however ſenſible and rational in " others?"† If wiſe and good men have differed upon the ſubject in all ages, and that owing to the obſcurity with which it is enveloped in the ſcriptures themſelves, why this abuſive and inſult-

* *Apol.* Ch. II. † *Catechist. Enquiry*, VI.

ing language? Is it any diſgrace to a perſon not to ſee that clearly in the ſcriptures, which is not clearly there to be ſeen?

Secondly: If the ſcriptures have indeed left the ſubject in obſcurity, how came Mr. Lindſey to be ſo decided upon it? The "high perfection "of knowledge" which he poſſeſſes, muſt undoubtedly have been acquired from ſome *other quarter;* ſeeing it made no part of the deſign of the holy Spirit, in the chriſtian revelation. But, if ſo, we have no further diſpute with him; as, in what reſpects religion, we do not aſpire to be *wiſe above what is written.*

Thirdly: Let it be conſidered, whether the principle on which Mr. Lindſey encourages the exerciſe of charity and mutual forbearance, do not caſt a heavy reflection upon the character of God. The ſcriptures, in what relates to the perſon of Chriſt, (a ſubject on which Dr. Prieſtley allows the writers to have been *infallible)* are left obſcure; ſo obſcure, as to miſlead readers full of heathen prejudices; nay, and with the very deſign of miſleading them. God himſelf, it ſeems, deſigned that they ſhould ſtumble on in ignorance, error, and diſagreement; till at laſt, wearied with their fate, and finding themſelves united in one common calamity, they might become friends. But what is this friendſhip? Is it not at the expenſe of him who is ſuppoſed to

have ſpread their way with ſnares; or which is the ſame thing, with miſleading obſcurity? Is it any other than the *friendſhip of the world, which is enmity with God?*

In perfect harmony with Mr. Lindſey, is the language of a writer in the *Monthly Review*. "The nature and deſign of the ſcripture (he "ſays) is not to ſettle diſputed theories, nor to "decide upon ſpeculative controverted queſ- "tions, even *in religion and morality*—The ſcrip- "tures, if we underſtand any thing of them, are "intended not ſo much to make us wiſer, as to "make us better; not to ſolve the doubts, but "rather to make us obey the dictates of our "conſciences."* The holy ſcriptures were never deſigned, then, to be a *rule* of faith or practice; but merely a *ſtimulative*. In matters of ſpeculation, (as all diſputed ſubjects will be termed, whether doctrinal, or practical) they have no authority, it ſeems, to decide any queſtion. *What ſaith the ſcriptures?* therefore, would now be an impertinent queſtion. You are to find out what is truth, and what is righteouſneſs, by your reaſon, and your conſcience; and when you have obtained a ſyſtem of religion and morality to your mind, ſcripture is to furniſh you with motives to reduce it to practice. If this be true,

* Rev. of *Biſhop Horſley's Sermon*, Mar. 1793. Vol. X. p. 357.

to what purpoſe are all appeals to the ſcriptures on controverted ſubjects; and why do ſocinians pretend to appeal to them? Why do they not honeſtly acknowledge, that they did not learn their religion from thence, and therefore refuſe to have it tried at that bar? This would ſave much labour. To what purpoſe do they object to particular paſſages as *interpolations* or *miſtranslations*, or the like, when the whole, be it ever ſo pure, has nothing at all to do in the deciſion of our controverſies? We have been uſed to ſpeak of conſcience having but *one maſter, even Chriſt:* but now, it ſeems, conſcience is its own maſter, and Jeſus Chriſt does not pretend to dictate to it, but merely to aſſiſt in the execution of its deciſions!

Mr. BELSHAM carries the matter ſtill further. This gentleman, not ſatisfied, it ſeems, with diſclaiming an implicit confidence in holy ſcripture, pretends to find *authority in the ſcriptures themſelves for ſo doing.* "The Bereans "(he ſays) are commended for not taking "the word even of an apoſtle, but examining "the ſcriptures for themſelves, whether the "doctrines which they heard were true, and "whether St. Paul's reaſoning was juſt."* I do not recollect, that the Bereans were com-

* *Serm. on Importance of Truth, p.* 39.

blended *for not taking the word of an apoſtle;* but for not rejecting it without examination, as the Jews did at Theſſalonica. But, granting it were otherwiſe, their ſituation was different from ours. They had not then had an opportunity of obtaining evidence that the apoſtles were divinely inſpired, or that the goſpel which they preached was a meſſage from God. This, ſurely, is a circumſtance of importance. There is a great difference between their entertaining ſome doubt of the truth of the goſpel, till they had fully examined its evidences; and our ſtill continuing to doubt of its particular doctrines and reaſonings, even though we allow it to be a meſſage from God.—To this may be added, that, in order to obtain evidence, the Bereans *ſearched the ſcriptures.* By comparing the facts which Paul teſtified, with the prophecies which went before; and the doctrines which he preached, with thoſe of the old teſtament; they would judge whether his meſſage was from God or not. There is a great difference between the criterion of the Bereans, and that of the ſocinians. The ſcriptures of the old teſtament were the allowed ſtandard of the former; and they employed their reaſon to find out their meaning, and their agreement with new teſtament facts: but the authority and agreement of the old and new teſtaments will not ſatisfy the latter; unleſs what they contain agree alſo with their pre-conceived notions of what is fit and rea-

ſonable. The one tried, what, for ought they at that time knew, were mere private reaſonings, by the ſcriptures; but the other try the ſcriptures by their own private reaſonings.—Finally: If propoſing a doctrine for examination, prove the propoſer liable to falſe or unjuſt reaſoning, it will follow, that the reaſoning of Chriſt might be falſe or unjuſt, ſeeing he appealed to the ſcriptures, as well as his apoſtles, and commanded his hearers to *ſearch* them. It will alſo follow, that all the great *facts* of chriſtianity, as well as the reaſonings of Chriſt and his apoſtles, were liable to be detected of falſehood; for theſe were as conſtantly ſubmitted to examination as the other. *Theſe things*, ſaid they, *were not done in a corner*. Nay, it muſt follow, that God himſelf is liable to be in a wrong cauſe, ſeeing he frequently appeals to men's judgments and conſciences. *And now, O inhabitants of Jeruſalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard.* The inhabitants of Jeruſalem, and men of Judah, were exhorted and even intreated, it may be ſaid, not to take matters upon truſt; but to examine for themſelves, whether the conduct of Jehovah was juſt, or whether any thing ought to have been done for his vineyard, that was not done!

But, far as our Engliſh ſocinians have gone in theſe things, they do not ſeem to have ex-

ceeded, nor hardly to have equalled, thoſe of the ſame denomination in other countries. Theſe appear to have made great advances, indeed, towards infidelity. Mr. *Blackwall* makes mention of two, whoſe language conveys an idea of uncommon diſreſpect to the ſacred writings. GEORGE ENGEDIN, ſpeaking of the writings of John, ſays, "If a conciſe, abrupt obſcurity, inconſiſtent with itſelf, and made up of allegories, is to be called ſublimity of ſpeech, I own *John* to be ſublime: for there is ſcarce one diſcourſe of Chriſt which is not altogether allegorical, and very hard to be underſtood." GAGNEIUS, another writer of the ſame ſpirit, ſays, "I ſhall not a little glory, if I ſhall be found to give ſome light to *Paul's* darkneſs; a darkneſs, as ſome think, induſtriouſly affected."—"Let any of the followers of theſe worthy interpreters of the goſpel, and champions of chriſtianity, (adds Mr. Blackwall, by way of reflection) ſpeak worſe if they can, of the ambiguous oracles of the father of lies. Theſe fair-dealing gentlemen firſt diſguiſe the ſacred writers, and turn them into a harſh allegory;—and then charge them with that obſcurity and inconſiſtency which is plainly conſequent upon that ſenſe, which their interpretations force upon them. They outrage the divine writers in a double capacity: firſt, they debaſe their ſenſe as theologues and commen-

" tators, and then carp at, and vilify their lan-
" guage as grammarians and critics."*

STEINBART, SEMLER, and other foreign ſocinians, of later times, write in a ſimilar ſtrain. The *former*, ſpeaking of the narrations of facts contained in the new teſtament, ſays, " Theſe " narrations, true or falſe, are only ſuited for " ignorant, uncultivated minds, who cannot en-" ter into the evidence of natural religion." The ſame writer adds, " Moſes, according to the " childiſh conceptions of the jews in his days, " paints God as agitated by violent affections, " partial to one people, and hating all other na-" tions."—The *latter*, in a Note on 2 Pet. i. 2. *The prophecy came not in old time, by the will of man, but holy men of God ſpake as they were moved by the holy Ghoſt*, ſays, " Peter ſpeaks there ac-" cording to the conception of the jews;" and, that " the prophets may have delivered the off-" ſpring of their own brains as divine revela-" tions."†

Socinian writers ſometimes profeſs great reſpect to the holy ſcriptures; and moſt, if not all of them, would have it thought that they conſider their teſtimony as being in their favour. But, if ſo, why all theſe pains to depreciate

* *Sacred Claſſics*, Pt. II. Ch. V. † Dr. Erskine's *Sketches and Hints of Church History*, No. III. p. 95, 71.

them? We know who they are that not only undermine their general credit, but are obliged on almoſt every occaſion, to have recourſe to *interpolation* or *miſtranſlation;* who are driven to diſown the apoſtolic *reaſonings* as a proper teſt of religious ſentiment, and to hold them as the mere private opinions of men, no way deciſive as to what is truth. But is it uſual in any cauſe for perſons to endeavour to ſet aſide thoſe witneſſes, and to invalidate that teſtimony, which they conſider, at the ſame time, as being in their favour? This is a queſtion which it does not require much critical ſkill to decide.

When ſocinian writers have mangled and altered the tranſlation to their own minds, informing us, that ſuch a term *may* be rendered ſo, and ſuch a paſſage ſhould be pointed ſo—and ſo on—they ſeem to expect that their opponents ſhould quote the ſcriptures accordingly; and, if they do not, are very liberal in inſinuating that their deſign is to impoſe upon the vulgar. But though it be admitted, that every tranſlation muſt needs have its imperfections, and that thoſe imperfections ought to be corrected by fair and impartial criticiſm: yet, where alterations are made by thoſe who have an end to anſwer by them, they ought always to be ſuſpected, and will be ſo by thinking and impartial people.

If we muſt quote particular paſſages of ſcripture, after the manner in which our adverſaries tranſlate them, we muſt alſo avoid quoting all thoſe which they object to as interpolations. Nor ſhall we ſtop here: we muſt, on certain occaſions, leave out whole chapters, if not whole books. We muſt never refer to the *reaſonings* of the apoſtles, but conſider that they were ſubject to be miſled by jewiſh prejudices; nor even to *hiſtorical facts*, unleſs we can ſatisfy ourſelves that the hiſtorians, independent of their being divinely inſpired, were poſſeſſed of ſufficient means of information. In ſhort, if we muſt never quote ſcripture, except according to the rules impoſed upon us by ſocinian writers, we muſt not quote it at all: not, at leaſt, till they ſhall have indulged us with a bible of their own, that ſhall leave out every thing on which we are to place no dependance. A publication of this ſort would doubtleſs be an acceptable preſent to the chriſtian world; would be compriſed in a *very ſmall compaſs;* and be of infinite ſervice in cutting ſhort a great deal of unneceſſary controverſy, into which, for want of ſuch a criterion, we ſhall always be in danger of wandering.

Dr. Prieſtley, in his *Animadverſions on Mr. Gibbon's Hiſtory*, takes notice of what is *implied* in that gentleman's endeavouring to leſſen the

number and validity of the early martyrdoms; namely, a conſciouſneſs that they afforded an argument againſt him. "Mr. Gibbon (ſays the "Doctor) appears to have been ſufficiently "ſenſible of the value of ſuch a teſtimony to "the truth of the goſpel hiſtory, as is furniſh-"ed by the early martyrdoms, and, therefore, "he takes great pains to diminiſh their num-"ber; and, when the facts cannot be denied, he "endeavours to exhibit them in the moſt unfa-"vourable light."* Judge, brethren, whether this picture does not bear too near a reſemblance to the conduct of Dr. Prieſtley, and other ſocinian writers, reſpecting the holy ſcriptures.

I have heard of perſons, who when engaging in a law-ſuit, and fearing leſt certain individuals ſhould appear in evidence againſt them, have ſo contrived matters as to *ſue the witneſſes;* and ſo, by making them parties in the conteſt, have diſqualified them for bearing teſtimony. And what elſe is the conduct of Dr. Prieſtley, with reſpect to thoſe paſſages in the new teſtament which ſpeak of Chriſt as GOD? We read there, that *The word, who was made fleſh, and dwelt among us,* WAS GOD. Thomas exclaimed, *My Lord, and my* GOD—*Of whom as concerning the fleſh, Chriſt came, who is over all,* GOD *bleſſed for*

* *Letters to a Phil. Unb.* Pt. II. p. 217.

ever—Unto the Son he ſaith, thy throne, O GOD, *is for ever and ever—Feed the Church of* GOD *which he hath purchaſed with his own blood—Hereby perceive we the love of* GOD, *becauſe he laid down his life for us.** But Dr. Prieſtley aſſerts, that "in no ſenſe whatever, not even "in the loweſt of all, is Chriſt ſo much as "called *God* in all the new teſtament.†" The method taken by this writer to enable him to hazzard ſuch an aſſertion, without being ſubject to the charge of downright falſehood, could be no other than that of laying a kind of *arreſt* upon the foregoing paſſages, with others, as being either interpolations, or miſtranſlations, or ſomething that ſhall anſwer the ſame end; and by theſe means impoſing ſilence upon them, as to the ſubject in diſpute. To be ſure, we may go on, killing one ſcripture teſtimony, and ſtoning another, till at length it will become an eaſy thing to aſſert, that there is not an inſtance in all the new teſtament, in which our opinions are confronted. But to what does it all amount? When we are told, that "Chriſt "is never ſo much as called *God* in all the "new teſtament;" the queſtion is, Whether we are to underſtand it of the new teſtament as it was left by the ſacred writers; or, as corrected,

* John i. 1, 14. xx. 28. Rom. ix. 5 Heb. i. 8. Acts xx. 28. 1 John iii. 16. † *Letter I. to Mr. Burn.*

amended, curtailed, and interpreted, by a ſet of controvertiſts, with a view to make it accord with a favourite ſyſtem?

I am, &c.

LETTER XIII.

ON THE TENDENCY OF THE DIFFERENT SYSTEMS, TO PROMOTE HAPPINESS, OR CHEERFULNESS OF MIND.

Chriſtian Brethren,

NOTHING is more common with our opponents, than to repreſent the Calviniſtic ſyſtem as gloomy; as leading to melancholy and miſery. Our ideas of God, of ſin, and of future puniſhment, they ſay, muſt neceſſarily depreſs our minds. Dr. Prieſtley, as we have ſeen already, reckons unitarians "more cheerful" than trinitarians. Nor is this all. It has even been aſſerted, that the tendency of our principles is to promote "moral turpitude, melan-"choly, and deſpair; and that the ſuicide prac-"tiſed among the middling, and lower ranks, "is frequently to be traced to this doctrine."* This is certainly carrying matters to a great height. It might be worth while, however, for thoſe who advance ſuch things as theſe, to make good what they affirm, if they be able.

* See *Crit. Rev.* for Sept. 1787, on *Memoirs of Gabriel D'Anville.*

Till that be done, candour itſelf muſt conſider theſe bold aſſertions as the mere effuſions of malignity and ſlander.

It is ſome conſolation, however, that what is objected to us by ſocinians, is objected to *religion itſelf* by unbelievers. Lord *Shafteſbury* obſerves, "There is a melancholy which accompanies all enthuſiaſm;" which, from his pen, is only another name for chriſtianity. To the ſame purpoſe Mr. *Hume* aſſerts, "There is a gloom and melancholy remarkable in all devout people." If theſe writers had formed a compariſon between deiſts and atheiſts on the one ſide, and devout chriſtians on the other, they would have ſaid of the former, as Dr. Prieſtley ſays of unitarians, "They are more cheerful, and more happy."

It is granted, that the ſyſtem we adopt, has nothing in it adapted to promote the happineſs of thoſe who perſiſt in enmity againſt God, and in a rejection of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, as the only way of ſalvation. While men are at war with God, we do not know of any evangelical promiſe that is calculated to make them happy. This, perhaps, with ſome may be a conſiderable ground of objection to our views of things; but then, ſuch objection muſt equally ſtand againſt the ſcriptures themſelves; ſince their language to ungodly men is, *Be afflicted, and mourn, and*

weep. All the prophets, and miniſters of the word were, in effect, commanded to *ſay to the wicked,* IT SHALL BE ILL WITH HIM. This, with us, is one conſiderable objection againſt the doctrine of *the final ſalvation of all men;* a doctrine much circulated of late, and generally embraced by ſocinian writers. Suppoſing it were a truth, it muſt be of ſuch a kind as is adapted to comfort mankind *in ſin.* It is good news; but it is to the impenitent and unbelieving, even thoſe who live and die ſuch; which is a characteriſtic ſo ſingular, that I queſtion whether any thing can be found in the bible to reſemble it. If our views of things be but adapted to encourage ſinners to return to God by Jeſus Chriſt; if they afford ſtrong conſolation to thoſe who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope ſet before them; and if ſobriety, righteouſneſs, and godlineſs, here meet with the moſt powerful motives; this is all that the ſcriptures themſelves propoſe.

Our ſyſtem, it is granted, is not adapted to promote that kind of cheerfulneſs and happineſs to which men in general are greatly addicted; namely, that which conſiſts in *ſelf-deceit,* and *levity of ſpirit.* There is a kind of cheerfulneſs like that of a tradeſman, who avoids looking into his accounts leſt they ſhould diſturb his

peace, and render him unhappy. This, indeed, is the cheerfulneſs of a great part of mankind; who ſhun the light, leſt it ſhould diſturb their repoſe, and interrupt their preſent purſuits. They try to perſuade themſelves that *they* ſhall have peace, though they add drunkenneſs to thirſt; and there are not wanting preachers who afford them aſſiſtance in the dangerous deluſion. The doctrines of human depravity, of ſinners being under the curſe of the law, and of their expoſedneſs to everlaſting puniſhment, are thoſe which are ſuppoſed to lead us to melancholy; and we may fairly conclude that the *oppoſites* to theſe doctrines are at the bottom of the cheerfulneſs of which our opponents boaſt. Inſtead of conſidering mankind as loſt ſinners, expoſed to everlaſting deſtruction; they love to repreſent them ſimply as creatures, as the children of God, and to ſuppoſe that, having in general more virtue than vice, they have nothing to fear; or if, in a few inſtances, it be otherwiſe, ſtill they have no reaſon to be afraid of *endleſs* puniſhment. Theſe things, to be ſure, make people cheerful; but it is with the cheerfulneſs of a wicked man. It is juſt as wicked men would have it. It is no wonder that perſons of "no religion, "and who lean to a life of diſſipation, ſhould "be the firſt to embrace theſe principles." They are ſuch as muſt needs ſuit them: eſ-

pecially if we add, what Dr. Prieſtley inculcates in his Sermon on the death of Mr. Robinſon, *That it is not neceſſary to dwell in our thoughts upon death and futurity, leſt it ſhould interrupt the buſineſs of life, and cauſe us to live in perpetual bondage.** We hope it is no diſparagement of the calviniſtic doctrine, that it diſclaims the promoting of all ſuch cheerfulneſs as this. That cheerfulneſs which is damped by thoughts of death and futurity, is, at beſt, mere natural joy. It has no virtue in it: nay, in many caſes, it is poſitively vicious, and founded in ſelf-deception. It is nothing better than *the laughter of a fool.* It may blaze awhile, in the boſoms of the diſſipated and the ſecure; but, if the ſinner be once awakened to juſt reflection, it will expire *like the crackling of thorns under a pot.*

There is alſo a kind of happineſs which ſome perſons enjoy, in treating the moſt ſerious and important ſubjects with *levity;* making them the ſubjects of jeſt, and trying their ſkill in diſputing upon them; which is frequently called pleaſantry, good-nature, and the like. A cheerfulneſs of this kind, in *Oliver Cromwell,* is praiſed by Mr. Lindſey, and re-

* This is the ſubſtance of what he advances, from p. 7 to 12.

preſented as an excellency "of which the gloomy bigot is utterly incapable."* Pleaſantry, on ſome occaſions, and to a certain degree, is natural, and allowable: but if ſporting with ſacred things muſt go by that name, let me be called "a gloomy bigot," rather than indulge it.

Once more: It is allowed, that the ſyſtem we embrace has a tendency on various occaſions to promote *ſorrow of heart.* Our notions of the evil of ſin exceed thoſe of our opponents. While they reject the doctrine of atonement by the croſs of Chriſt, they have not that glaſs in which to diſcern its malignity, which others have. There are times in which we remember Calvary, and weep on account of that for which our Redeemer died. But ſo far are we from conſidering this as our infelicity, that, for weeping in this manner once, we could wiſh to do ſo a thouſand times. There is a pleaſure in the very pains of godly ſorrow, of which the light-minded ſpeculatiſt is utterly incapable. The tears of her that wept, and waſhed her Saviour's feet, afforded abundantly greater ſatisfaction than the unfeeling calm of the phariſee, who ſtood by making his ill-natured reflections upon her conduct.

If our views of things have no tendency to promote ſolid, holy, heavenly joy; joy that fits true chriſtians for the proper buſineſs of this world, and the bleſſedneſs of that which is to come; we will acknowledge it a ſtrong preſumption againſt them. If on the other hand, they can be proved to poſſeſs ſuch a tendency, and that in a much greater degree than the oppoſite ſcheme, it will be a conſiderable argument in their favour. Let us examine this matter a little cloſer.

The utmoſt happineſs which the peculiar principles of ſocinians are adapted to promote, conſiſts in *calmneſs of mind*, like that of a philoſopher contemplating the works of creation. The friends of that ſcheme conceive of man as a good kind of Being, and ſuppoſe there is a greater proportion of virtue in the world than vice, and that things upon the whole are getting better ſtill, and ſo tending to happineſs. They ſuppoſe there is little or no breach between God and men; nothing but what may be made up by repentance, a repentance without much pain of mind,* and without any atoning Saviour; that God, being the benevolent Father of his rational offſpring, will not

* Such a repentance is pleaded for by Mr. *Jardine* in his *Letters to Mr. Bogue.*

be ſtrict to mark iniquity; and that, as his benevolence is infinite, all will be well at laſt: *As with the good, ſo with the ſinner; with him that ſweareth, as with him that feareth an oath.* This makes them ſerene; and enables them to purſue the ſtudies of philoſophy, or the avocations of life, with compoſure. This appears to be the ſummit of their happineſs; and muſt be ſo of all others, if they wiſh to eſcape their cenſure. For if any one pretends to happineſs of a ſuperior kind, they will inſtantly reproach him as an enthuſiaſt. A writer in the *Monthly Review* obſerves, concerning the late *Preſident Edwards;* "From the account given of him, "he appears to have been a very reputable, "good, and pious man, according to his *views* "*and feelings* in religious matters; which thoſe "of different ſentiments, and cooler ſenſations, "will not fail to conſider as all wild *exſtaſy,* "*rapture, and enthuſiaſm.*"*

The tendency of any ſyſtem to promote *calmneſs*, is nothing at all in its favour, any further than ſuch calmneſs can be proved to be virtuous. But this muſt be determined by the ſituation in which we ſtand. We ought to be affected according to our ſituation. If, indeed, there be no breach between God and men; if

* Rev. of *Edwards's Hiſt. of Redemption*, Vol. LXXX. Art. 68.

all be right on our part, as well as his, and juſt as it ſhould be; then it becomes us to be calm and thankful: but if it be otherwiſe, it becomes us to feel accordingly. If we have offended God, we ought to bewail our tranſgreſſions, and be ſorry for our ſin; and if the offence be great, we ought to be deeply affected with it. It would be thought very improper for a convict, a little before the time appointed for his execution, inſtead of cheriſhing proper reflections on the magnitude of his offence, and ſuing for the mercy of his offended ſovereign, to be employed in ſpeculating upon his benevolence, till he has really worked himſelf into a perſuaſion that no ſerious apprehenſions were to be entertained, either concerning himſelf, or any of his fellow convicts. Such a perſon might enjoy a much greater degree of *calmneſs* than his companions: but conſiderate people would neither admire his mode of thinking, nor envy his imaginary felicity.

Calmneſs and ſerenity of mind *may* ariſe from ignorance of ourſelves, and from the want of a principle of true religion. While Paul was ignorant of his true character, he was calm and eaſy, or, as he expreſſes it, *alive without the law;* but *when the commandment came,* in its ſpirituality and authority, *ſin revived, and he died.* The phariſee who was *whole* in his own

eſteem, and needed no phyſician, was abundantly more calm than the publican, who ſmote upon his breaſt, and cried, *God be merciful to me a ſinner!* While any man is deſtitute of a principle of true religion, the ſtrong man armed keepeth the houſe, and the goods are in *peace;* and while things are thus, he will be a ſtranger to all thoſe holy mournings which abound in the pſalms of David, and to thoſe inward conflicts between *fleſh and ſpirit* deſcribed in the writings of Paul. And, knowing nothing of ſuch things himſelf, he will be apt to think meanly of thoſe who do; to deride them as enthuſiaſts, to reproach them with gloomineſs, and to boaſt of his own inſenſibility, under the names of calmneſs and cheerfulneſs.

Suppoſing the calmneſs and cheerfulneſs of mind of which our opponents boaſt, to be on the ſide of virtue; ſtill it is a cold and inſipid kind of happineſs, compared with that which is produced by the doctrine of ſalvation through the atoning blood of Chriſt. One great ſource of happineſs is *contraſt.* Dr. Prieſtley has proved, what indeed is evident from univerſal experience, "That the recol-"lection of paſt troubles, after a certain in-"terval, becomes highly pleaſurable, and is a "pleaſure of a very refined kind."* On this

* *Let. to a Phil. Unb.* Pt. I. Let. VI.

principle he undertakes to prove the infinite benevolence of the Deity, even in his ſo ordering things, that a mixture of pain and ſorrow ſhall fall to the lot of man. On the ſame principle may be proved, if I miſtake not, the ſuperiority of the calviniſtic ſyſtem to that of the ſocinians, in point of promoting happineſs. The doctrines of the former, ſuppoſing them to be true, are *affecting*. It is affecting to think, that man, originally pure, ſhould have fallen from the height of righteouſneſs and honour, to the depth of apoſtaſy and infamy—that he is now an enemy to God, and actually lies under his awful and juſt diſpleaſure, expoſed to everlaſting miſery—that, notwithſtanding all this, a ranſom is found to deliver him from going down to the pit—that God ſo loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son to become a ſacrifice for ſin, that whoſoever believeth in him ſhould not periſh, but have eternal life—that the iſſue of Chriſt's death is not left at an uncertainty, nor the invitations of his goſpel ſubject to univerſal rejection, but an effectual proviſion is made in the great plan of redemption, that he ſhall ſee of the travail of his ſoul, and be ſatisfied—that the holy Spirit is given to renew and ſanctify a people for himſelf—that they who were under condemnation and wrath, being juſtified by faith in the righteouſneſs of Jeſus, have peace with

God—that aliens and outcaſts are become the ſons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty—that everlaſting arms are now beneath them, and everlaſting glory is before them.—Theſe ſentiments, I ſay, ſuppoſing them to be true, are undoubtedly *affecting*. The ſocinian ſyſtem, ſuppoſing it were true, compared with this, is cold, unintereſting, and inſipid.

We read of *joy and peace in believing*—of *joy unſpeakable, and full of glory*. Thoſe who adopt the calviniſtic doctrine of the exceeding ſinfulneſs of ſin, and of their own loſt condition as ſinners, are prepared to imbibe the joy of the goſpel, ſuppoſing it to exhibit a great ſalvation, through the atonement of a great Saviour, to which others, of oppoſite ſentiments, muſt of neceſſity be ſtrangers. The phariſees, who thought well of their character and condition, like the elder ſon in the parable, inſtead of rejoicing at the good news of ſalvation to the chief of ſinners, were diſguſted at it: and this will ever be the caſe with all who, like the phariſees, are *whole* in their own eyes, ſo whole as to think they need no phyſician.

The votaries of the ſocinian ſcheme do not, in general, appear to feel their hearts much intereſted by it. *Voltaire* could ſay in his time, "At leaſt hitherto, only a very ſmall num-

" ber of thoſe called unitarians have held any " religious meetings."* And though Dr. Prieſtley, by his great zeal, has endeavoured to invigorate and reform the party; yet he admits the juſtice of a common complaint among them, that " their ſocieties do not flouriſh, " their members have but a ſlight attachment " to them, and eaſily deſert them, though it " is never imagined (he adds) that they de- " ſert their principles."† All this the Doctor accounts for by allowing, that their principles are not of that importance which we ſuppoſe ours to be; and that " many of thoſe who " judge ſo truly concerning the particular te- " nets of religion, have attained to that cool, " unbiaſed temper of mind, in conſequence of " becoming more indifferent to religion in ge- " neral, and to all the modes and doctrines of " it." Through *indifference*, it ſeems, they come in; through *indifference* they go out; and are very *indifferent* while there. Yet, it is ſaid, they ſtill retain their principles; and, I ſuppoſe, are very cheerful, and very happy. Happineſs, theirs, conſequently, which does not intereſt the heart, any more than reform the life.

Although the aforementioned writer in the *Monthly Review* inſinuates, that *Preſident Ed-*

* *Additions to Gen Hiſt.* Art. *England*, under Charles II.

† *Diſcourſes on Various Subjects*, p. 94.

wards's religious feelings were "all wild ecſtaſy, "rapture and enthuſiaſm;" yet he adds, "We "cannot queſtion the ſincerity of Mr. Ed- "wards, who, however he may poſſibly have "impoſed on himſelf by the warmth of his "imagination, was perhaps, rather to be en- "vied, than derided for his ardours and ecſta- "cies, which, in themſelves were, at leaſt, in- "nocent; in which he, no doubt, found much "delight, and from which no creature could "receive the leaſt hurt." I thank you, ſir, for this conceſſion. It will, at leaſt, ſerve to ſhew, that the ſentiments and feelings which you deem wild and enthuſiaſtical, may, by your own acknowledgement, be the moſt adapted to promote human happineſs; and that is all for which I at preſent contend. Preſident Edwards, however, was far from being a perſon of that warm imagination, which this writer would inſinuate. No man could be a greater enemy to real enthuſiaſm. Under the moſt virulent oppoſitions, and the heavieſt trials, he poſſeſſed a great ſhare of coolneſs of judgment, as well as of calmneſs and ſerenity of mind; as great, and perhaps greater, than any one whom this gentleman can refer us to, among thoſe whom he calls men of *cool ſenſations*. But he felt deeply in religion; and to ſuch feelings, our adverſaries themſelves being judges, he was to be "envied, and not derided."

Why ſhould religion be the only ſubject in which we muſt not be allowed to *feel?* Men are praiſed for the exerciſe of ardour, and even of ecſtaſy, in poetry, in politics, and in the endearing connections of ſocial life; but, in religion, we muſt either go on with cool indifference, or be branded as enthuſiaſts. Is it becauſe religion is of leſs importance than other things? Is eternal ſalvation of leſs conſequence than the political or domeſtic accommodations of time? It is treated by multitudes as if it were; and the ſpirit of ſocinianiſm, ſo far as it operates, tends to keep them in countenance. Is it not a pity but thoſe who call themſelves *rational chriſtians*, would act more rationally? Nothing can be more irrational, as well as injurious, than to encourage an ardour of mind after the trifles of a moment, and to diſcourage it when purſuing objects of infinite magnitude.

" Paſſion is reaſon, tranſport temper here!"

The ſocinian ſyſtem propoſes to exclude *myſtery* from religion, or, " things in their own nature incomprehenſible."* But ſuch a ſcheme not only renders religion the only thing in nature void of myſtery, but diveſts it of a property eſſential to the continued communica-

* *Def. of Unit. for* 1786, p. 67.

tion of happineſs to an immortal creature. Our paſſions are more affected by objects which ſurpaſs our comprehenſion, than by thoſe which we fully know. It is thus with reſpect to *unhappineſs*. An unknown miſery is much more dreadful than one that is fully known. Suſpenſe adds to diſtreſs. If, with regard to tranſient ſufferings, we know the worſt, the worſt is commonly over: and hence our troubles are frequently greater when feared, than when actually felt. It is the ſame with reſpect to *happineſs*. That happineſs which is felt in the purſuit of ſcience, abates in the full poſſeſſion of the object. When once a matter is fully known, we ceaſe to take that pleaſure in it as at firſt, and long for ſomething new. It is the ſame in all other kinds of happineſs. The mind loves to ſwim in deep waters: if it touch the bottom it feels diſguſt. If the beſt were once fully known, the beſt would thence be over. Some of the nobleſt paſſions in Paul were excited by objects incomprehenſible: *O the depth of the riches, both of the wiſdom and knowledge of God! How unſearchable are his judgments, and his ways paſt finding out!—Great is the myſtery of godlineſs: God was manifeſt in the fleſh, juſtified in the ſpirit, ſeen of angels, believed on in the world, received up into glory!* Now, if things be ſo, it is eaſy to ſee, that, to diveſt religion of every

thing incomprehenſible, is to diveſt it of what is eſſential to human happineſs. And no wonder: for it is nothing leſs than to diveſt it of GOD!

The ſocinian ſcheme, by rejecting the deity and atonement of Chriſt, rejects the very eſſence of that which both ſupports and tranſports a chriſtian's heart. It was acknowledged by Mr. Hume, that, "The *good*, the *great*, "the *ſublime*, and the *raviſhing* were to be "found evidently in the principles of theiſm." To this Dr. Prieſtley very juſtly replies; "If "ſo, I need not ſay that there muſt be ſome-"thing *mean*, *abject*, and *debaſing* in the prin-"ciples of atheiſm."* But let it be conſidered, whether this obſervation be not equally applicable to the ſubject in hand. Our opponents it is true, may hold ſentiments which are great and tranſporting. Such are their views of the works of God in creation: but ſo are thoſe of deiſts. Neither are theſe the ſentiments in which they differ from us. Is the ſocinian ſyſtem, *as diſtinguiſhed from ours*, adapted to raiſe and tranſport the heart? This is the queſtion. Let us ſelect only one topic for an example. Has any thing, or can any thing be written, on the ſcheme

* *Letters to a Phil. Unb.* Pt. I. preſ. p. x

of our adverſaries, upon *the death of Chriſt* equal to the following lines?

" Religion! thou the ſoul of happiness;
And groaning *Calvary* of thee! *there* shine
The noblest truths; *there* strongest motives sting!
There sacred violence assaults the soul.——
My theme! my inspiration! and my crown!
My strength in age! my rise in low estate!
My soul's ambition, pleasure, wealth!—my world!
My light in darkness! and my life in death!
My boast through time! bliss through eternity!
Eternity too short to speak thy praise!
Or fathom thy profound of love to man!
To man, of men the meanest, ev'n to me;
My sacrifice! my God! what things are these!"

Again:

" Pardon for infinite offence! and pardon,
Through means that speak its value infinite!
A pardon bought with blood! with blood divine!
With blood divine of him I made my foe!
Persisted to provoke! though woo'd, and aw'd,
Bless'd, and chastis'd, a flagrant rebel still!
A rebel 'midst the thunders of his throne!
Nor I alone, a rebel universe!
My species up in arms! not one exempt!
Yet for the foulest of the foul he dies!——
Bound every heart! and every bosom burn!
Oh what a scale of miracles is here!——
Praise! flow for ever (if astonishment
Will give thee leave) my praise! for ever flow;
Praise ardent, cordial, constant, to high Heaven
More fragrant than Arabia sacrific'd;
And all her spicy mountains in a flame!"

Night Thoughts, No. IV.

There is a richness, greatness, and ravishing quality in the foregoing sentiments, which no other

theme can inſpire. 'Had the writer been a ſocinian, and attempted to write upon the death of Chriſt, he might, by the ſtrength of his mind and the fire of his genius, have contributed a little to raiſe his ſubject; but here his ſubject raiſes him above himſelf.

The dignity of Chriſt, together with his glorious undertaking, was, as we have ſeen in Letter XI. a ſource of joy and love to the primitive chriſtians. It was their darling theme, and that which raiſed them above themſelves. Now, according to our ſyſtem, chriſtians may ſtill rejoice in the ſame manner; and give vent to their ſouls, and to all that is within them, and that without fear of going beyond the words of truth and ſoberneſs; or of bordering, or ſeeming to border, upon idolatry. But upon the principles of our opponents, the ſacred writers muſt have dealt largely in hyperbole; and it muſt be our buſineſs, inſtead of entering into their ſpirit, to ſit down with "cool ſenſations," criticiſe their words, and explain away their apparent meaning.

Brethren! I appeal to your own hearts, as men who have been brought to conſider yourſelves as the ſcripture repreſent you; Is there any thing in that preaching which leaves out the doctrine of ſalvation by an atoning ſacrifice, that can afford you any relief? Is it not

like the prieſt and levite who paſſed by on the other ſide? Is not the doctrine of atonement by the blood of Chriſt, like the oil and wine of the good Samaritan? Under all the preſſures of life, whether from inward conflicts, or outward troubles, is not this your grand ſupport? What but *an advocate with the Father*, one *who is the propitiation for our ſins*, could prevent you, when you have ſinned againſt God, from ſinking into deſpondency, and encourage you to ſue afreſh for mercy? What elſe could ſo diveſt affliction of its bitterneſs; death of its ſting; or the grave of its gloomy aſpect? In fine, what elſe could enable you to contemplate a future judgment with compoſure? What hope could you entertain of being juſtified at that day upon any other footing than this, *It is Chriſt that died?*

I am aware I ſhall be told, that this is appealing to the paſſions, and to the paſſions of enthuſiaſts. To which it may be replied; in a queſtion which relates to happineſs, the *heart* is the beſt criterion: and if it be enthuſiaſm to think and feel concerning ourſelves as the ſcriptures repreſent us, and concerning Chriſt as he is there exhibited, let me live and die an enthuſiaſt. So far from being aſhamed to appeal to ſuch characters, in my opinion they are the only competent judges. Men of mere ſpeculation play with doctrines: it is the plain

and ſerious chriſtian that knows moſt of their real tendency. In a queſtion, therefore, which concerns their happy or unhappy influence, his judgment is of the greateſt importance.

Dr. Prieſtley allows, that "the doctrine "of a general, and a moſt particular provi- "dence, is ſo leading a feature in every ſcheme "of predeſtination, it brings God ſo much "into every thing,—that an habitual and ani- "mated devotion is the reſult."* This witneſs is true: nor is this all. The ſame principle, taken in its connection with various others, equally provides for a ſerene and joyful ſatisfaction in all the events of time. All the viciſſitudes of nations; all the furious oppoſitions to the church of Chriſt; all the efforts to overturn the doctrine of the croſs, or blot out the ſpirit of chriſtianity from the earth, we conſider as permitted for wiſe and holy ends. And, being ſatisfied that they make a part of God's eternal plan, we are not inordinately anxious about them. We can aſſure our opponents, that when we hear them boaſt of their increaſing numbers, as alſo profeſſed unbelievers of theirs, it gives us no other pain than that which ariſes from good will to men. We have no doubt that theſe things are wiſely p r m i-

* *Doc. of Neceſſity*, p. 162.

ted; that they are a fan in the hand of Chriſt, by which he will thoroughly purge his floor; and that the true goſpel of Chriſt, like the ſun in the heavens, will finally diſperſe all theſe interpoſing clouds. We are perſuaded, as well as they, that things upon the whole, whether we in our contracted ſpheres of obſervation perceive it or not, are tending to the general good; that the empire of truth and righteouſneſs, notwithſtanding all the infidelity and iniquity that are in the world, is upon the increaſe; that it muſt increaſe more and more; that glorious things are yet to be accompliſhed in the church of God; and that all which we have hitherto ſeen, or heard, of the goſpel diſpenſation, is but as the firſt fruits of an abundant harveſt.

The tendency of a ſyſtem to promote preſent happineſs, may be eſtimated by the degree of *ſecurity* which accompanies it. The obedience and ſufferings of Chriſt, according to the calviniſtic ſyſtem, conſtitute the ground of our acceptance with God. *A good moral life*, on the other hand, is the only foundation on which our opponents profeſs to build their hopes.* Now, ſuppoſing our principles ſhould prove erroneous, while they do not lead us to neglect good works,

* See the quotations from Dr. Prieſtley, Dr. Harwood, and Mrs. Barbauld, Let. IX.

but to abound in them from love to God, and with a regard to his glory; it may be preſumed, that the divine Being will not caſt us off to eternity for having aſcribed too much to him, and too little to ourſelves. But if the principles of our opponents ſhould be found erroneous, and the foundation on which they build their hopes, ſhould at laſt give way, the iſſue muſt be fatal! I never knew a perſon in his dying moments alarmed for the conſequences of having aſſumed too little to himſelf, or for having aſcribed too much to Chriſt; but many at that hour of ſerious reflection, have been more than a little apprehenſive of danger from the contrary.

After all, it is allowed, that there is a conſiderable number of perſons amongſt us, who are under too great a degree of mental dejection; but though the number of ſuch perſons, taken in the aggregate, be conſiderable, yet there are not enow of them to render it any thing like a *general* caſe. And as to thoſe who are ſo, they are almoſt all of them ſuch, either from conſtitution, from the want of a mature judgment to diſtinguiſh juſt cauſes of ſorrow, or from a ſinful neglect of their duties and their advantages. Thoſe who enter moſt deeply into our views of things, provided their conduct be conſiſtent, and there be no particular pro-

penſity to gloomineſs in their conſtitution, are among the happieſt people in the world.

I am, &c.

LETTER XIV.

A COMPARISON OF MOTIVES, EXHIBITED BY THE TWO SYSTEMS, TO GRATITUDE, OBEDIENCE, AND HEAVENLY-MINDEDNESS.

Chriſtian Brethren,

THE ſubject of this Letter has been occaſionally noticed already; but there are a few things in reſerve that require your attention. As men are allowed on both ſides to be influenced by *motives*, which ever of the ſyſtems it is that excels in this particular, that of courſe muſt be the ſyſtem which has the greateſt tendency to promote a holy life.

One very important motive with which the ſcriptures acquaint us, is, THE LOVE OF GOD, MANIFESTED IN THE GIFT OF HIS SON. *God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son; that whoſoever believeth in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life—Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and ſent his Son to be a propitiation for our ſins—God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet ſinners, Chriſt died for us—He that ſpared not his own Son, how ſhall he de-*

*livered him up for us all—Behold, if God so loved us, we ought alſo to love one another.** The benevolence of God to men is repreſented in the new teſtament as conſiſting, not in his overlooking their frailties, nor ſo much even in his forgiving their ſins, as in giving his only-begotten Son to die for them. *Herein was love,* and herein was found the grand motive to grateful obedience. There is no neceſſity, indeed, for eſtabliſhing this point, ſince Dr. Prieſtley has fully acknowledged it. He allows that "the love of God in giving his Son to die "for us, is the conſideration on which the "ſcriptures always lay the greateſt ſtreſs as a "motive to gratitude and obedience."† As this is a matter of fact, then, allowed on both ſides, it may be worth while to make ſome enquiry into the reason of it; or *why* it is that ſo great a ſtreſs ſhould be laid in the ſcriptures upon this motive. To ſay nothing of the ſtrong preſumption which this acknowledgment affords in favour of the doctrine of atonement, ſuffice it at preſent to obſerve, that in all other caſes, an obligation to gratitude is ſuppoſed to bear ſome proportion to the magnitude or *value* of the gift. But if it be allowed in this inſtance, it will follow, that the ſyſtem which gives us the

* John iii. 16. 1 John iv. 10, 11. Rom. v. 8. and viii. 32.

† *Def. of Unit. for* 1786. p. 102.

moſt exalted views of the dignity of Chriſt, muſt include the ſtrongeſt motives to obedience and gratitude.

If there be any meaning in the words, the phraſeology of John iii. 16, *God ſo loved the world, that he gave* HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON,—conveys an idea of the higheſt worth in the object beſtowed. So great was this gift, that the love of God in the beſtowment of it is conſidered as *inexpreſſible* and *ineſtimable*. We are not told *how much* he loved the world, but that he ſo loved it, that he gave HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON. If Jeſus Chriſt be of more worth than the *world* for which he was given, then was the language of the ſacred writer fit and proper; and then was the gift of him truly great, and worthy of being made "the conſideration upon which the ſcriptures ſhould lay the greateſt ſtreſs, as a motive to gratitude and obedience." But if he be *merely a man* like ourſelves, and was given only to inſtruct us by his doctrine and example, there is nothing ſo *great* in the gift of him, nothing that will juſtify the language of the ſacred writers from the appearance of bombaſt; nothing that ſhould render it a motive to gratitude and obedience upon which the greateſt ſtreſs ſhould be laid.

Dr. *Prieſtley*, in his *Letters to Dr Price*, obſerves, that "In paſſing from trinitarianiſm

" to high arianiſm, from this to your low arian-
" iſm, and from this to ſocinianiſm, even of
" the loweſt kind, in which Chriſt is conſidered
" as a mere man, the ſon of Joſeph and Mary;
" and naturally as fallible and peccable as Mo-
" ſes or any other prophet, there are ſufficient
" ſources of gratitude and devotion. I myſelf,
" (continues Dr. Prieſtley) have gone through
" all thoſe changes, and I think I may aſſure
" you that you have nothing to apprehend
" from any part of the progreſs. In every ſtage
" of it you have that conſideration on which
" the ſcriptures always lay the greateſt ſtreſs,
" as a motive to gratitude and obedience; viz.
" the love of God, the Almighty Parent, in
" giving his Son to die for us. And whether
" this Son be man, angel, or of a ſuper-angelic
" nature, every thing that he has done is to be
" referred to the *love of God*, the original au-
" thor of all, and to him all our gratitude and
" obedience is ultimately due."*

Dr. *Prieſtley*, it ſeems, wiſhes to have it thought, that, ſeeing trinitarians, arians, and ſocinians agree, in conſidering the gift of Chriſt as an expreſſion of the love of God; therefore, their different ſyſtems are upon a

* *Def. of Unit. for* 1786, pp. 101, 102.

level, as to the grand motive to gratitude and obedience. As if it made no difference at all, whether that gift was ſmall or great; whether it was a man, or an angel, or one whom men and angels are bound to adore; whether it was to die, as other martyrs did, to ſet us an example of perſeverance; or, by laying down his life as an atoning ſacrifice, to deliver us from the wrath to come. He might as well ſuppoſe the gift of one talent to be equal to that of ten thouſand, and that it would induce an equal return of gratitude; or that the gift of Moſes, or any other prophet, afforded an equal motive to love and obedience, as the gift of Chriſt.

If in every ſtage of religious principle, whether trinitarian, arian, or ſocinian, by admitting that one general principle, *The love of God in giving his Son to die for us,* we have the ſame motive to gratitude and obedience, and that in the ſame degree; it muſt be becauſe the greatneſs or ſmallneſs of the gift is a matter of no conſideration, and has no tendency to render a motive ſtronger or weaker. But this is not only repugnant to the plaineſt dictates of reason, as hath been already obſerved; but alſo to the doctrine of Chriſt. According to this, *He that hath much forgiven, loveth much; and he that hath little forgiven, loveth little.* From hence it appears, that the ſyſtem which affords

the moſt extenſive views of the evil of ſin, the depth of human apoſtaſy, and the magnitude of redemption, will induce us to love the moſt, or produce in us the greateſt degree of gratitude and obedience.

It is to no purpoſe to ſay, as Dr. *Prieſtley* does, "Every thing that Chriſt hath done is to be referred to *the love of God.*" For be it ſo, the queſtion is, if his ſyſtem be true, *What hath he done;* and what is there to be referred to the love of God? To ſay the moſt, it can be but little. If Dr. Prieſtley be right, the breach between God and man is not ſo great but that our repentance and obedience are of themſelves, without any atonement whatever, ſufficient to heal it. Chriſt, therefore, could have but *little to do.* But, the leſs he had to do, the leſs we are indebted to him, and to God for the gift of him: and in proportion as this is believed, we muſt of courſe feel leſs gratitude, and devotedneſs of ſoul to God.

Another important motive with which the ſcriptures acquaint us, is, THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN COMING INTO THE WORLD, AND LAYING DOWN HIS LIFE FOR US. *Let this mind be in you which was alſo in Chriſt Jeſus; who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himſelf of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a ſer-*

vant, and was made in the likeneſs of men—For ye know the grace of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that though he was rich, yet for your ſakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich—Foraſmuch as the children were partakers of fleſh and blood, he alſo himſelf took part of the ſame; that through death he might deſtroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil—Verily, he took not on him the nature of angels, but the ſeed of Abraham—The love of Chriſt conſtraineth us: becauſe we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live ſhould not henceforth live unto themſelves, but unto him who died for them, and roſe again—Walk in love, as Chriſt alſo hath loved us, and hath given himſelf for us, an offering, and a ſacrifice to God for a ſweet ſmelling ſavour—To him that loved us, and waſhed us from our ſins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Such is the uniform language of the new teſtament concerning the love of Chriſt; and ſuch are the moral purpoſes to which it is applied. It is a preſumption in favour of our ſyſtem, that here the above motives have all their force; whereas, in the ſyſtem of our opponents, they have ſcarcely any force at all. The following obſervations, may render this ſufficiently evident.

We conſider the coming of Chriſt into the world as a *voluntary undertaking*. His *taking upon him*, or *taking hold*, not of the nature of angels, but the ſeed of Abraham; his *taking upon him* the form of a ſervant, and being made in the likeneſs of men, and that from a ſtate of *mind* which is held up for our example; and his becoming *poor*, though *previouſly rich*, for our ſakes, and that as an act of grace, all concur to eſtabliſh this idea. For this we feel our hearts bound by every conſideration that love unparalleled can inſpire, to gratitude and obedience But our opponents, by ſuppoſing Chriſt to have been a mere man, and to have had no exiſtence till he was born of Mary, are neceſſarily driven to deny that his coming into the world was a voluntary act of his own; and, conſequently, that there was any love or *grace* in it. Dr. Prieſtley, in anſwer to Dr. Price, contends only that he "came into the world in obedi- "ence to the command of the Father, and not "in conſequence of his own propoſal." But the idea of his coming in obedience to the command of the Father, is as inconſiſtent with the ſocinian ſcheme, as his coming in conſequence of his own propoſal. For, if he had no exiſtence previous to his being born of Mary, he could do neither the one nor the other.

It would be perfect abſurdity to ſpeak of *our* coming into the world as *an act of obedience:* and on the hypotheſis of Dr. Prieſtley, to ſpeak of the coming of Chriſt under ſuch an idea, muſt be equally abſurd.*

We conſider Chriſt's coming into the world, as an act of *condeſcending love;* ſuch, indeed, as admits of no parallel. The *riches* of deity, and the poverty of humanity; the *form of God*, and *the form of a ſervant*, afford a contraſt that fills our ſouls with grateful aſtoniſhment. Dr. *Prieſtley*, in the laſt mentioned performance, acknowledges, that, "The trinitarian doctrine "of the incarnation is calculated forcibly to "impreſs the mind with divine condeſcenſion." He allows the doctrine of the incarnation, as held by the arians, to have ſuch a tendency in a degree: but he tells Dr. *Price*, who pleaded this argument againſt ſocinianſm, that, "The trinitarian hypotheſis of the ſupreme "God becoming man, and then ſuffering and "dying for us, would, no doubt, impreſs the "mind more forcibly ſtill."† This is one allowed ſource of gratitude and obedience, then, to which the ſcheme of our adverſaries makes no pretence, and for which it can ſupply nothing adequate. But Dr. Prieſtley thinks to

* *Def. of Unit.* for 1786, p. 103. † Page 103.

cut up at one ſtroke, it ſeems, all the advantages which his opponents might hope to gain from theſe conceſſions, by adding; "With what "unſpeakable reverence and devotion do the "catholics eat their Maker!" That a kind of ſuperſtitious devotion may be promoted by falſehood, is admitted: ſuch was the *voluntary humility* of thoſe who worſhipped angels. But, as thoſe characters, with all their pretended humility, were vainly *puffed up with a fleſhly mind;* ſo, all that appearance of reverence and devotion which is the offspring of ſuperſtition, will be found to be ſomething at a great remove from piety or devotedneſs to God. The ſuperſtitions of popery, inſtead of promoting reverence and devotion, have been thought, by blinding the mind and encumbering it with other things, to deſtroy them.*. There are times in which Dr. Prieſtley himſelf "cannot conceive "of any practical uſe being made of tranſub-"ſtantiation:"† but now it is put on a level with a doctrine which, it is allowed, "tends "forcibly to impreſs the mind with divine con-"deſcenſion."

Once more: We believe that Chriſt, in laying down his life for us, actually *died as our*

* See Mr. Robinſon's *Sermon*, on 2 Cor. iv. 4. entitled, *The Chriſtian Doctrine of Ceremonies.*

† *Def. of Unit. for* 1786, p. 33.

ſubſtitute; endured the curſe of the divine law, that we might eſcape it; was delivered for our offences, that we might be delivered from the wrath to come; and all this, while we were yet enemies. This is a conſideration of the greateſt weight: and if we have any juſtice or ingenuouſneſs about us, love like this muſt conſtrain us to live, not to ourſelves, but to him that died for us, and roſe again! But, according to our adverſaries, Chriſt died *for us* in no higher ſenſe than a common martyr, who might have ſacrificed his life to maintain his doctrine; and by ſo doing, have ſet an example for the good of others. If this be all, Why ſhould not we be as much indebted, in point of gratitude, to Stephen, or Paul, or Peter, who alſo in that manner died for us, as to Jeſus Chriſt? And why is there not the ſame reaſon for their death being propoſed as a motive for us to live to them, as for his, that we might live to him?

But there is another motive which Dr. Prieſtley repreſents as being "that in chriſ-"tianity which is moſt favourable to virtue; "namely, a future ſtate of retribution, ground-"ed on the firm belief of the hiſtorical facts "recorded in the ſcriptures; eſpecially in the "miracles, the death, and the reſurrection of "Chriſt. The man (he adds) who believes

" theſe things only, and who, together with " this, acknowledges an univerſal providence, " ordering all events; who is perſuaded that " our very hearts are conſtantly open to the " divine inſpection, ſo that no iniquity, or pur- " poſe of it, can eſcape his obſervation, will " not be a bad man, or a dangerous member " of ſociety."* Dr. Prieſtley, elſewhere, as we have ſeen, acknowledges that " the love of " God in giving his Son to die for us, is " *the conſideration on which the ſcriptures al-* " *ways lay the greateſt ſtreſs*, as a motive to " gratitude and obedience;" and yet he ſpeaks here, of " a future ſtate of retribution as be- " ing that in chriſtianity which is *moſt favour-* " *able to virtue.*" One ſhould think, that what the ſcriptures always lay the greateſt ſtreſs upon, ſhould be that in chriſtianity which is moſt favourable to virtue, be it what it may. But, waving this, let it be conſidered whether the calviniſtic ſyſtem has not the advantage even upon this ground. The doctrine of a future ſtate of retribution, is a ground poſſeſſed by calviniſts, as well as by ſocinians; and, perhaps, it may be found that their views of that ſubject, and others connected with it, are more favourable to virtue and a holy life, than thoſe of their adverſaries.

* *Letter V. to Mr. Burn.*

A motive of no ſmall importance, by which we profeſs to be influenced, is, *The thought of our own approaching diſſolution.* Brethren, if you embrace what is called the calviniſtic view of things, you conſider it as your duty and intereſt to be frequently converſing with mortality. You find ſuch thoughts have a tendency to moderate your attachments to the preſent world; to preſerve you from being inordinately elated by its ſmiles, or dejected by its frowns. The conſideration of the *time being ſhort*, teaches you to hold all things with a looſe hand; to weep as though you wept not, and to rejoice as though you rejoiced not. You reckon it a mark of true wiſdom, to keep the end of your lives habitually in view; and to follow the advice of the holy ſcriptures, where you are directed to *go to the houſe of mourning, rather than to the houſe of feaſting;* where the godly are deſcribed as praying, *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wiſdom;* and God himſelf as ſaying, *O that they were wiſe, that they underſtood this, that they would conſider their latter end.** But theſe things, inſtead of being recommended and urged as motives of piety, are diſcouraged by Dr. Prieſtley; who teaches, that, *It is not neceſſary to dwell in our thoughts upon death and futurity, leſt it ſhould interrupt the*

* Eccles. vii. 2. Pſalm xc. 12. Deut. xxxii. 29.

*buſineſs of life, and cauſe us to live in perpetual bondage.**

The ſcriptures greatly recommend the virtue of *heavenly-mindedneſs.* They teach chriſtians to conſider themſelves as ſtrangers and pilgrims on the earth; to be dead to the world, and to conſider their life, or portion, as hid with Chriſt in God. The ſpiritual, holy, and happy ſtate, which, according to the calviniſtic ſyſtem, commences at death, and is augmented at the reſurrection, tends more than a little to promote this virtue. If, brethren, you adopt theſe views of things, you conſider the body as a tabernacle, a temporary habitation; and when this tabernacle is diſſolved by death, you expect a houſe not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Hence it is, that you deſire to be abſent from the body, and preſent with the Lord. There are ſeaſons in which your views are expanded, and your hearts enlarged. At thoſe ſeaſons eſpecially, the world loſes its charms, and you ſee nothing worth living for, except to ſerve and glorify God. You have, in a degree, the ſame feelings which the apoſtle Paul appears to have poſſeſſed, when he ſaid, *I am in a ſtrait betwixt two, having a deſire to depart, and to be with Chriſt, which is far better—For me to live*

* *Sermon on the Death of Mr. Robinſon*, p. 7—22.

is Chriſt, and to die is gain. But Dr. Prieſtley teaches, that the heavenly ſtate ſhall not commence till the reſurrection. He does not ſuppoſe that there is any ſtate of exiſtence, ſtrictly ſpeaking, wherein we ſhall be abſent from the body, and preſent with the Lord; for he conſiders the ſoul as having no exiſtence at all ſeparate from the body. He muſt, therefore, of neceſſity be a ſtranger to any ſuch *ſtrait*, as that mentioned by the apoſtle. If the queſtion were put to him, or to any of his ſentiments, Whether they would chuſe to abide longer *in the fleſh*, (which might be profitable to their connexions) or immediately depart this life? They would be at no loſs what to anſwer. They could not, in any rational ſenſe, conſider death as *gain*. It would be impoſſible for them, upon their principles, to deſire to depart. Conceiving that they come to the poſſeſſion of heavenly felicity as ſoon, if they die fifty years hence, as if they were to die at the preſent time, they muſt rather deſire to live as long as the courſe of nature will admit; ſo long, however, as life can be conſidered as preferable to non-exiſtence. It would indicate even a mean and unworthy temper of mind, upon their principles, to be in ſuch a *ſtrait* as Paul deſcribes. It would imply, that they were weary of their work, and at a loſs whether they ſhould chuſe a ceſſation of

being, or to be employed in ſerving God, and in doing good to their fellow-creatures.

The NATURE and EMPLOYMENTS of the heavenly ſtate, deſerve alſo to be conſidered. If you adopt the calviniſtic view of things, you conſider the enjoyments and employments of that ſtate in a very different light, from that in which ſocinian writers repreſent them. You read in your bibles, that *the Lord will be our everlaſting light, and our God our glory*—that *our life is hid with Chriſt, in God*—that, *when he ſhall appear, we ſhall appear with him in glory*—And, that we ſhall then *be like him, for we ſhall ſee him as he is.* Hence you conclude, that A FULL ENJOYMENT OF GOD, AND CONFORMITY TO HIM, ARE THE SUM OF HEAVEN. You read further, that the bliſs in reſerve for chriſtians is *a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory*—that *now we are the ſons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we ſhall be:* and from hence you naturally conclude, that THE HEAVENLY STATE WILL ABUNDANTLY SURPASS ALL OUR PRESENT CONCEPTIONS OF IT. Again, you read that *thoſe who ſhall be found worthy to obtain that world, and the reſurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God.* Hence you conclude, that THE EMPLOYMENTS AND ENJOYMENTS OF THAT STATE ARE ALTOGETHER SPIRITUAL AND HOLY. You read of

our knowledge here being *in part;* but that there we ſhall *know even as we are known;* and that *the Lamb, which is in the midſt of the throne, ſhall feed us, and lead us to living fountains of water.* Hence you conclude, that we ſhall not only enjoy greater means of knowledge, which, like a fountain, will flow for ever, and aſſuage our thirſty ſouls, but, that OUR MINDS WILL BE ABUNDANTLY IRRADIATED, AND OUR HEARTS ENLARGED, BY THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST; WHOSE DELIGHTFUL WORK IT WILL BE TO OPEN THE BOOK, AND TO LOOSE THE SEALS; TO UNFOLD THE MYSTERIES OF GOD; AND TO CONDUCT OUR MINDS AMIDST THEIR BOUNDLESS RESEARCHES. Once more: You read concerning thoſe who ſhall obtain that world and the reſurrection, *that they cannot die any more*—that they ſhall *go no more out*—that the *inheritance* to which they are reſerved is *incorruptible, and fadeth not away*—and that the weight of glory which we look for is *eternal.* Hence you conclude, that THE IMMORTALITY PROMISED TO CHRISTIANS IS CERTAIN AND ABSOLUTE.

Theſe are very important matters, and muſt have a great influence in attracting your hearts toward heaven. Theſe were the things which cauſed the patriarchs to live like ſtrangers and pilgrims on the earth. They looked for a habitation, a better country, even a heavenly one. Theſe were the things that made the apoſtles and

primitive chriſtians conſider their afflictions as *light* and *momentary. For this cauſe,* ſay they, *we faint not; but though our outward man periſh, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: while we look not at the things which are ſeen, but at the things which are not ſeen; for the things which are ſeen are temporal, but the things which are not ſeen are eternal.*

But if you adopt the ſocinian view of things, your ideas of the heavenly ſtate, compared with the above, will be miſerably flat and cold; and conſequently, your affections will be more ſet on things below, and leſs on things above. Dr. Prieſtley, in his *Sermon on the death of Mr. Robinſon,* is not only employed in diſſuading people from too much thought and fear about death; but from too much *hope* reſpecting the ſtate beyond it. He ſeems to fear leſt we ſhould form *too high* expectations of heavenly felicity, and ſo meet with a diſappointment. The heaven which he there deſcribes, does not neceſſarily include *any one of the foregoing ideas;* but might exiſt if they were all excluded!

Take his own words: "The change of our "*condition* by death may not be ſo great as we "are apt to imagine. As our *natures* will not "be changed, but only *improved,* we have no

" reaſon to think that the *future world* (which
" will be adapted to our merely improved na-
" ture) will be *materially different from this.*
" And indeed why ſhould we aſk, or expect any
" thing more? If we ſhould ſtill be obliged to
" provide for our ſubſiſtence by exerciſe, or la-
" bour; is that a thing to be complained of by
" thoſe who are ſuppoſed to have acquired
" fixed habits of induſtry, becoming rational
" beings, and who have never been able to bear
" the languor of abſolute reſt, or indolence? Our
" future happineſs has, with much reaſon, been
" ſuppoſed to ariſe from an increaſe of know-
" ledge. But if we ſhould have nothing more
" than the *means* of knowledge furniſhed us,
" as we have here, but be left to our own labour
" to find it out; is that to be complained of by
" thoſe who will have acquired a *love of truth,*
" and a habit of enquiring after it? To make
" diſcoveries ourſelves, though the ſearch may
" acquire time and labour, is unſpeakably more
" pleaſing than to learn every thing by the
" information of others.* If the *immortality*
" that is promiſed to us in the goſpel ſhould
" not be *neceſſary,* and *abſolute,* and we ſhould

* Is not this the rock on which Dr. Prieſtley and his brethren ſplit? Have they not on this very principle coined a goſpel of their own, instead of receiving the inſtructions of the ſacred writers?

" only have the *certain means* of making our-
" ſelves immortal, we ſhould have much to be
" thankful for. What the ſcriptures inform us
" concerning a future life is expreſſed in ge-
" neral terms, and often in figurative language.
" A more particular knowledge of it is wiſely
" concealed from us."*

You ſee, brethren, here is not one word of God, or of Chriſt, as being the ſum and ſubſtance of our bliſs; and, except that mention is made of our being freed from " imperfections bodily and mental," the whole conſiſts of mere *natural* enjoyments; differing from the paradiſe of mahometans chiefly in this, that their enjoyments are principally ſenſual, whereas theſe are moſtly intellectual. Thoſe are adapted to gratify the voluptuary, and theſe the philoſopher. Whether ſuch a heaven will ſuit a holy mind, or be adapted to draw forth our beſt affections, judge ye.

I am, &c.

* Page 18.

LETTER XV.

ON THE RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN SOCINIANISM AND INFIDELITY, AND THE TENDENCY OF THE ONE TO THE OTHER.

Chriſtian Brethren,

I Suppoſe we may take it for granted, at preſent, That chriſtianity is favourable to true virtue, and that infidelity is the reverſe. If it can be proved, therefore, that ſocinianiſm reſembles infidelity in ſeveral of its leading features, and has a direct tendency towards it, that will be the ſame as proving it unfavourable to true virtue.

It has been obſerved, and I think juſtly, that "there is no conſiſtent medium between "genuine chriſtianity, and infidelity." The ſmalleſt departure from the one, is a ſtep towards the other. There are different degrees of approach, but all move on in the ſame direction. Socinians, however, are not willing to own that their ſcheme has any ſuch tendency. Dr. Prieſtley appears to be more than a little hurt, at being repreſented by the bigots (as he politely calls thoſe who think ill of his principles) as undermining chriſtianity; and intimates, that by their rigid attachment to certain doctrines, ſome are forced into infidelity, while others are ſaved from it by his conci-

liating principles.* Many things to the ſame purpoſe are advanced by Mr. Lindſey, in his *Diſcourſe addreſſed to the congregation, at the chapel in Eſſex Street, Strand; on reſigning the paſtoral office among them.* We are to accommodate our religion, it ſeems, to the notions and inclinations of infidels, and then they would condeſcend to receive it. This principle of *accommodation* has been already noticed in Letter III. And it has been ſhown, from the example of the popiſh miſſionaries in China, to have no good tendency. To remove every ſtumbling-block out of the way of infidels, would be to annihilate the goſpel. Such attempts alſo ſuppoſe what is not true; That their not believing in chriſtianity is owing to ſome fault in the ſyſtem as generally received, and not to the

* Here the late Mr. Robinson of Cambridge is brought in as an example; who, as some think, in an excess of complaisance, told the Doctor in a private Letter, that, "But for "his friendly aid, he feared he should have gone from en-"thusiasm to deism." *Letters to Mr. Burn, Preface.* To say nothing whether the use Dr. Priestley made of this *private letter* was warrantable, and whether it would not have been full as modest to have forborne to publish to the world so high a compliment on himself; supposing not only the thing itself to have been strictly true, but that the conduct of Dr. Priestley was as strictly proper, what does it prove? Nothing, except that the region of socinianism is so near to that of deism, that now and then an individual, who was on the high road to the one, has stopped short, and taken up with the other.

temper of their own minds. Faults there are, no doubt: but if their hearts were right, they would ſearch the ſcriptures for themſelves, and form their own ſentiments according to the beſt of their capacity.

The near relation of the ſyſtem of ſocinians to that of infidels, may be proved from the agreement of their principles, their prejudices, their ſpirit, and their ſucceſs.

Firſt: There is an agreement in their *leading principles*.—One of the moſt important principles in the ſcheme of infidelity, it is well known, is, THE SUFFICIENCY OF HUMAN REASON. This is the great bulwark of the cauſe, and the main ground on which its advocates proceed in rejecting revelation. If the one, ſay they, be ſufficient, the other is unneceſſary. Whether the ſocinians do not adopt the ſame principle, and follow hard after the deiſts in its application too, we will now enquire.—When Mr. Burn charged Dr. Prieſtley with making "the reaſon of the individual the ſole umpire in matters of faith;" the Doctor denied the charge, and ſuppoſed that Mr. Burn muſt have been "reading the writings of Bolingbroke, Hume, or Voltaire, and have imagined them to be his:" as if none but profeſſed infidels maintained that principle. This, however, is allowing it to be a principle pertaining to infidelity;

and of ſuch importance, it ſhould ſeem, as to diſtinguiſh it from chriſtianity. If it ſhould prove, therefore, that the ſame principle occupies a place, yea, and an equally important place in the ſocinian ſcheme, it will follow that ſocinianiſm and deiſm muſt be nearly allied. But Dr. Prieſtley, as was ſaid, denies the charge; and tells us that he "has written a great deal to prove *the inſufficiency of human reaſon:*" he alſo accuſes Mr. Burn of "the groſſeſt and moſt unfounded calumny," in charging ſuch a principle upon him.*

If what Mr. Burn alleges, be "a groſs and unfounded calumny," it is rather extraordinary that ſuch a number of reſpectable writers ſhould have ſuggeſted the ſame thing. I ſuppoſe there has been ſcarcely a writer of any note among us, but who, if this be calumny, has calumniated the ſocinians. If there be any credit due to trinitarian authors, they certainly have hitherto *underſtood* matters in a different light from that in which they are here repreſented. They have ſuppoſed, whether rightly or not, that their opponents in general do hold the very principle which Dr. Prieſtley ſo ſtrongly diſavows.

* *Letter IV. to Mr. Burn.*

But this is not all. If what Mr. Burn alleges be a groſs and unfounded calumny, it is ſtill more extraordinary, that ſocinian writers ſhould calumniate themſelves. Mr. Robinſon, whom Dr. Prieſtley glories in as his convert, affirms much the ſame thing, and that in his *Hiſtory of Baptiſm;* a work publiſhed after he had adopted the ſocinian ſyſtem. In anſwering an objection brought againſt the baptiſts as being enthuſiaſts, he aſks; "Were Caſtelio, and Servetus, Socinus, and Crellius enthuſiaſts? On the contrary, they are taxed with attributing *too much to reaſon,* AND THE SUFFICENCY OF REASON IS THE SOUL OF THEIR SYSTEM."* If the laſt member of this ſentence be true, and if Dr. Prieſtley have maintained the ſame principle as much as any of his predeceſſors; then is what Mr. Burn alleges true alſo, and no calumny.—Further: If Mr. Robinſon's words be true, the ſyſtem of a Socinus, and of a Bolingbroke, however they may differ in ſome particulars, cannot be very wide aſunder. They may be *two bodies;* but the difference cannot be very material, ſo long as thoſe bodies are inhabited by ONE SOUL.

But was not Mr. Robinſon miſtaken? Has he not inadvertently granted that which ought not in juſtice to have been granted? Suppoſe

* Page 47.

this to be a fact, why might not the ſame conſtruction have been put upon what is alleged by Mr. Burn, and other trinitarian writers, inſtead of calling it by the hard name of "groſs and unfounded calumny?" If we ſay no worſe of our opponents than they ſay of themſelves, they can have no juſt grounds of complaint; at leaſt, they ſhould complain with leſs ſeverity.

Further: If Mr. Robinſon was miſtaken, and if Dr. Prieſtley do really maintain *the inſufficiency of human reaſon* in matters of religion; it will follow, after all that he has pleaded in behalf of reaſon, that he is no better friend to it than other people. The doctor often reminds his calviniſtic opponents of an *old ſaying*, that "No man is againſt reaſon, till reaſon is againſt him." Old ſayings, to be ſure, prove much in argument. This old ſaying, however, is very juſt, provided the term *reaſon* be underſtood of *the real fitneſs of things.* Dr. Prieſtley's opponents are not againſt reaſon, in this ſenſe of the word; but againſt ſetting up *the reaſon of the individual* as umpire in matters of faith: and this, we ſee, is no more than the doctor himſelf diſavows; in that he ſuppoſes a principle of this kind is no where to be found, except in ſuch writings as thoſe of Bolingbroke, of Hume, or of Voltaire. He tells us that he has "written

" much to prove the *inſufficiency* of human rea-
" ſon, and the neceſſity of divine revelation."
He is then profeſſedly *againſt reaſon* in the ſame ſenſe as his opponents are; and the deiſts might remind him of his " old ſaying" with as much propriety as he reminds other people of it.

Once more: If Mr. Robinſon was miſtaken, and if his conceſſion be beyond the bounds of juſtice and propriety; it will follow, that notwithſtanding what Dr. Prieſtley has ſaid of *ſaving him from infidelity*, he was not ſaved from it after all. Whether Mr. Robinſon's words convey a juſt idea of ſocinianiſm, or not, they muſt be allowed to expreſs what were *his own ideas* of it. Whatever, therefore, Dr. Prieſtley believes, *he* appears to have believed in *the ſufficiency of reaſon*. But if none beſides infidels maintain that principle, it muſt follow, that Dr. Prieſtley's glorying in Mr. Robinſon is vain: and that, ſo far from ſaving him from infidelity, as he boaſts, he was not ſaved from it; but was the diſciple of a Bolingbroke, of a Hume, or of a Voltaire, rather than of a Prieſtley.

But, after all, was Mr. Robinſon indeed miſtaken? Is not " the ſufficiency of reaſon the ſoul of the ſocinian ſyſtem?" It is true, ſocinians do not openly plead, as do the deiſts, that reaſon is *ſo* ſufficient, as that revelation

is unneceſſary; nor is it ſuppoſed that Mr. Robinſon meant to acknowledge that they did. But do they not conſtantly advance what amounts to the ſame thing? I do not know what publications Dr. Prieſtley refers to, when he ſpeaks of having written a great deal to prove the "inſufficiency of human reaſon, and the ne-"ceſſity of divine revelation:" but if it be upon the ſame principles as thoſe which he avows in his other productions, I do not ſee how he can have proved his point. According to theſe principles, the ſacred writers were as liable to err as other men, and in ſome inſtances actually did err; producing "lame accounts, "improper quotations, and inconcluſive rea-"ſonings;" and that it is the province of reaſon not only to judge of their credentials, but of the particular doctrines which they advance.* Now, this is not only "making the reaſon of "the individual the ſole umpire in matters of "faith," but virtually rendering revelation unneceſſary. If the reaſon of the individual be to ſit ſupreme judge, and inſiſt that every doctrine which revelation propoſes ſhall approve itſelf to its dictates, or be rejected; the neceſſity of the latter might as well be totally denied. If it be neceſſary, however, it is no otherwiſe

* See *Letter XII.*

than as a French parliament uſed to be neceſſary to a French king: not in order to dictate to his majeſty, but to afford a ſanction to his reſolutions; or, at moſt, to tender him a little advice, in order to aſſiſt him in forming his judgment; which advice, notwithſtanding, he might receive or reject, as beſt ſuited his inclination.

Dr. Prieſtley often ſuggeſts, that he makes no other uſe of human reaſon than all proteſtants make againſt the papiſts, when pleading againſt the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation; that is, where the literal ſenſe of a text involves an abſurdity, he ſo far follows the dictates of reaſon as to underſtand it figuratively. But this is not the caſe: for the queſtion here does not at all reſpect the *meaning* of ſcripture, whether it ſhould be underſtood literally or figuratively; but whether its *allowed* meaning ought to be accepted as truth, any further than it correſponds with our pre-conceived notions of what is reaſon? According to the principles and charges before cited, it ought not; and this is not only ſummoning revelation to the bar of our own underſtandings, but actually paſſing ſentence againſt it.

The near affinity of ſocinianiſm to deiſm is ſo manifeſt, that it is in vain to diſown it. Nobody ſuppoſes them to be entirely the ſame. One

acknowledges Chriſt to be a true prophet; the other conſiders him as an impoſtor: but the denial of the proper inſpiration of the ſcriptures, with the receiving of ſome part of them as true, and the rejecting of other parts even of the ſame books as "lame accounts, improper quotations, and inconcluſive reaſonings," naturally lead to deiſm. Deiſts themſelves do not ſo reject the bible as to diſbelieve every hiſtorical event which is there recorded. They would not deny, I ſuppoſe, that there were ſuch characters in the world as Abraham, Moſes, and Jeſus; and that ſome things which are written concerning each, are true.

In ſhort, they take what they like beſt, as they would from any other ancient hiſtory, and reject the reſt: and what does Dr. Prieſtley even pretend to more? He does not reject *ſo much* as a deiſt: he admits various articles which the other denies; but the difference is only in degree. The relation between the firſt and leading principles of their reſpective ſyſtems is ſo near, that one ſpirit may be ſaid to pervade them both; or, to uſe the imagery of Mr. Robinſon, one ſoul inhabits theſe different bodies. The oppoſition between faith and unbelief is ſo great in the ſcriptures, that no leſs than ſalvation is promiſed to the one, and damnation threatened

to the other: but if they were no further aſunder than ſocinianiſm and deiſm, it is paſſing ſtrange that their conſequences ſhould be ſo widely different.

Another leading principle common to ſocinians and deiſts, is, *The non-importance of principle itſelf, in order to the enjoyment of the divine favour.*—Nothing is more common than for profeſſed infidels to exclaim againſt chriſtianity, on account of its rendering the belief of the goſpel neceſſary to ſalvation. Lord Shaftesbury inſinuates, that the heathen magiſtrates, in the firſt ages of chriſtianity, might have been juſtly offended "with a notion which treated them, "and all men, as profane, impious, and dam-"ned, who entered not into particular modes "of worſhip, of which there had been formerly "ſo many thouſand kinds inſtituted, all of them "compatible, and ſociable, till that time."* To the ſame purpoſe is what Mr. Paine advances; who, I imagine, would make no pretence of friendſhip towards chriſtianity. "If we "ſuppoſe a large family of children, (ſays he) "who on any particular day, or particular cir-"cumſtance, made it a cuſtom to preſent to "their parents ſome token of their affection "and gratitude, each of them would make a "different offering, and moſt probably in a

* *Characteriſtics*, Vol. I. §8.

" different manner. Some would pay their con-
" gratulations in themes of verſe, or proſe, by
" ſome little devices as their genius dictated, or
" according to what they thought would pleaſe;
" and, perhaps, the leaſt of all, not able to do
" any of thoſe things, would ramble into the
" garden or the field, and gather what it
" thought the prettieſt flower it could find,
" though, perhaps, it might be but a ſimple
" weed. The parent would be more gratified
" by ſuch a variety, than if the whole of them
" had acted on a concerted plan, and each had
" made exactly the ſame offering."* And this he applies, not merely to the diverſified modes of worſhipping God, which come within the limits of the divine command; but to the various ways in which mankind have in all ages and nations worſhipped, or pretended to worſhip a deity. The ſentiment which this writer, and all others of his ſtamp, wiſh to propagate, is, That in all modes of religion men may be very ſincere; and that, being ſo, all are alike acceptable to God. This is infidelity undiſguiſed. Yet this is no more than Dr. Prieſtley has advanced in his *Differences in Religious Opinions.* " If we can be ſo happy, (he ſays) as to be-
" lieve, that—all differences in modes of wor-
" ſhip may be only the different methods by

* *Rights of Man*, Pt. II. near the conclusion.

" which different men (who are equally *the* " *offspring of God)* are endeavouring to honour " and obey their common parent, our differ- " ences of opinion would have no tendency to " leſſen our mutual love and eſteem."*

Nor is Dr. Prieſtley the only writer of the party who unites with the author of *The Age of Reaſon*, in maintaining that it matters not what religion we are of, if we be but ſincere in it. Dr. *Toulmin* has laboured to defend this notion, and to prove from Acts x. 34, 35. and Rom. ii. 6, 10, 12. that it was maintained by Peter and Paul.† But before he had pretended to palm it upon them, he ſhould have made it evident that Cornelius, when he *feared God, and worked righteouſneſs*, and thoſe gentiles, when they are ſuppoſed to have *worked good*, and to be heirs of *glory, honour and peace*, were each of them actually living in idolatry; and being ſincere, that God was well pleaſed with it. It is no part of the queſtion, whether heathens may be ſaved; but whether they may be ſaved *in their heatheniſm;* and whether heatheniſm and chriſtianity be only different modes of worſhipping our common Father, and alike acceptable to him?

Several other principles might be mentioned in which ſocinians and deiſts are agreed; and in

* Sect. II. † *Practical Efficacy*, pp. 164, 165. 2nd Ed.

which the ſame objections that are made by the one againſt calviniſm, are made by the other againſt the holy ſcriptures. Do ſocinians reject the calviniſtic ſyſtem, becauſe it repreſents God as a vindictive Being? For the ſame reaſon the ſcriptures themſelves are rejected by the deiſts. Are the former offended with calviniſm, on account of the doctrines of atonement, and of divine ſovereignty? The latter are equally offended with the bible for the ſame reaſons. They know very well that theſe doctrines are contained in the ſcriptures; but they diſlike them, and reject the ſcriptures partly on account of them. The ſufficiency of repentance to ſecure the divine favour—the evil of ſin conſiſting merely in its tendency to injure the creature—all puniſhment being for the good of the offender, as well as for the public good—with various other principles, which are oppoſed in theſe Letters in defence of calviniſm; are the ſame things for ſubſtance, which thoſe who have written again the deiſts, have had to encounter, when defending revelation.* It is a conſolation to us to trace theſe likeneſſes, as it affords a preſumption that our ſentiments accord with the ſcriptures, being liable to the ſame objections.

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* See Leland's *Defence of Chriſtianity*, againſt Tindall, Vol. I. Chap. 4, 6, 8.

Socinian writers not only make the ſame objections to calviniſm, which deiſts make to revelation; but, in ſome inſtances, have ſo far forgotten themſelves as to unite with the latter in pointing their objections againſt revelation itſelf. Steinbart and Semler (as quoted in Letter XII.) have fallen foul upon the writers of the old and new teſtament. "Moſes, (ſays "the former) according to the childiſh con- "ceptions of the jews in his days, paints God "as agitated by violent affections; partial to "one people, and hating all other nations."— "Peter, (ſays the latter, 2 Epiſ. i. 21.) ſpeaks "according to the conception of the jews, and "the prophets may have delivered the off- "ſpring of their own brains as divine revela- "tions."* The infidelity of ſocinians is frequently covered with a very thin diſguiſe; but here the veil is entirely thrown off. One thing, however, is ſufficiently evident: while they vent their antipathy againſt the holy ſcriptures in ſuch indecent language, they betray a conſciouſneſs that the contents of that ſacred volume are againſt them.

The likeneſs of ſocinianiſm to deiſm will further appear, if we conſider, Secondly, The ſimilarity of their *prejudices*.—The peculiar pre-

* Dr. Erskine's *Sketches and Hints of Church History*, No. III. pp. 65—71.

judices of deiſts are drawn, I think, with great juſtneſs, by Dr. Prieſtley himſelf. "There is "no claſs or deſcription of men, (he obſerves) "but what are ſubject to peculiar prejudi- "ces, and every prejudice muſt operate as an "obſtacle to the reception of ſome truth. It "is in vain for unbelievers to pretend to be "free from prejudices. They may indeed be "free from thoſe of the vulgar, but they have "others peculiar to themſelves; and the very "affectation of being free from vulgar preju- "dices, and of being wiſer than the reſt of man- "kind, muſt indiſpoſe them to the admiſſion "even of truth, if it ſhould happen to be with "the common people. The ſuſpicion that the "faith of the vulgar is ſuperſtitious and falſe, "is, no doubt, often well-founded; becauſe "they, of courſe, maintain the *oldeſt opinions*, "while the ſpeculative part of mankind are "making new diſcoveries in ſcience. Yet we "often find that they who pride themſelves "on their being the fartheſt removed from "ſuperſtition in ſome things, are the greateſt "dupes to it in others; and it is not uni- "verſally true that all old opinions are falſe, "and all new ones well-founded. An averſion "to the creed of the vulgar may therefore "miſlead a man, and from a fondneſs for ſin- "gularity he may be ſingularly in the wrong."*

* *Letters to a Phil. Unb.* Pt. II. Lett. V.

Let thoſe who are beſt acquainted with ſocinians judge whether this addreſs, with a very few alterations, be not equally adapted to them, as to profeſſed unbelievers. We know who they are, beſides avowed infidels, who affect to be "emancipated from *vulgar prejudices* and "*popular ſuperſtitions*, and to embrace a rational "ſyſtem of faith."* It is very common with ſocinian writers, as much as it is with deiſts, to value themſelves on being wiſer than the reſt of mankind, and to deſpiſe the judgment of plain chriſtians, as being the judgment of the *vulgar* and the *populace*. It is true, Dr. Prieſtley has addreſſed Letters to the common people at Birmingham, and has complimented them with being "capable of judging in matters of religion and government." However, it is no great compliment to chriſtians in general of that deſcription, to ſuppoſe, as he frequently does, not only that the trinitarian ſyſtem, but every other, was the invention of learned men in different ages, and that the vulgar have always been led by their influence. "The creed "of the vulgar of the preſent day, (he ob-"ſerves) is to be conſidered not ſo much as "*their* creed, for they were not the inventors "of it, as that of the thinking and inquiſitive "in ſome former period. For thoſe whom we

* *Mr. Belsham's Sermon*, p. 4—32.

" diſtinguiſh by the appellation of the *vulgar*, " are not thoſe who introduce any new opi- " nions, but who receive them from others, of " whoſe judgment they have been led to think " highly."* On this principle, Dr. Prieſtley ſomewhere expreſſes his perſuaſion of the future prevalence of unitarianiſm. He grants that, at preſent, the body of common chriſtians are againſt it; but as the learned and the ſpeculative are verging towards it, he ſuppoſes the other will in time follow them. What is this but ſuppoſing them incapable of forming religious ſentiments for themſelves; as if the Bible were to them a ſealed book, and they had only to believe the ſyſtem that happened to be in faſhion, or rather *to have been* in faſhion ſome years before they were born, and to dance after the pipe of learned men?

It is acknowledged that, in matters of human ſcience, common people, having no ſtandard to judge by, are generally led by the learned; but ſurely it is ſomewhat different in religion, where we have a ſtandard, and one too that is adapted to the underſtanding of the ſimple. However many people may be led implicitly by others, yet there will always be a number of plain, intelligent, ſerious chriſtians, who will read the bible and judge for them-

* *Letters to a Phil. Unb.* Pt. II. Let. V.

ſelves; and chriſtians of this deſcription will always have a much greater influence, even upon thoſe who do not judge for themſelves, than mere ſpeculative men, whom the moſt ignorant cannot but perceive to be wanting in ſerious religion, and reſpect to mankind; and while this is the caſe, there is no great danger of the body of common christians becoming ſocinians.

Thirdly: There is a *bold, profane, and daring ſpirit*, diſcovered in the writings of infidels; a ſpirit that fears not to ſpeak of ſacred things with the moſt indecent freedom.—They love to ſpeak of Chriſt with a ſneer, calling him *the Carpenter's ſon, the Galilean*, or ſome ſuch name, which in their manner of expreſſing it, conveys an idea of contempt. Though ſocinians do not go ſuch lengths as theſe, yet they follow hard after them in their profane and daring manner of ſpeaking. Were it proper to refer to the ſpeeches of private individuals, language might be produced very little inferior in contempt to any of the foregoing modes of expreſſion: and even ſome of thoſe who have appeared as authors, have diſcovered a ſimilar temper. Beſides the examples of Engedin, Gagneius, Steinbart, and Semler, (as quoted in Lett. XII.) the *magnanimity* which has been aſcribed to Dr. Prieſtley, for cenſuring the moſaic narrative of the fall of man, calling it "a LAME account," is an inſtance of the ſame irreverent ſpirit.

Fourthly: The alliance of ſocinianiſm to deiſm, may be inferred from this, That the *ſucceſs* of the one bears a proportion to that of the other, and reſembles it in the moſt eſſential points.—Socinians are continually boaſting of their ſucceſs, and of the great increaſe of their numbers; ſo alſo are the deiſts, and I ſuppoſe with equal reaſon. The number of the latter has certainly increaſed in the preſent century in as great, if not a greater proportion, than the former. The truth is, a ſpirit of infidelity is the main temptation of the preſent age, as a perſecuting ſuperſtition was of ages paſt. This ſpirit has long gone forth into the world. In different denominations of men it exiſts in different degrees, and appears to be permitted to try them that dwell upon the earth. Great multitudes are carried away with it; and no wonder: for it diſguiſes itſelf under a variety of ſpecious names; ſuch as *liberality*, *candour*, and *charity*, by which it impoſes upon the unwary. It flatters human pride, calls evil propenſity *nature*, and gives looſe to its dictates; and in proportion as it prevails in the judgments, as well as in the hearts of men, it ſerves to abate the fear of death and judgment, and ſo makes them more cheerful than they otherwiſe would be.

It is alſo worthy of notice, that the ſucceſs of ſocinianiſm and deiſm has been amongſt the ſame ſort of people; namely, *men of a ſpeculative turn of mind.* Dr. *Prieſtley* ſomewhere obſerves, that "learned men begin more and more to ſuſpect the doctrine of the trinity:" and poſſibly it may be ſo. But then it might with equal truth be affirmed, that learned men begin more and more to ſuſpect chriſtianity. Dr. Prieſtley himſelf acknowledges, that "among "thoſe who are called philoſophers, the unbe-"lievers are the crowd."* It is true, he flatters himſelf, that their numbers *will* diminiſh, and that "the evidences of chriſtianity will "meet with a more impartial examination in the "preſent day, than they have done in the laſt "fifty years." But this is mere conjecture, ſuch as hath no foundation in fact. We may as well flatter ourſelves that ſocinians will diminiſh: there is equal reaſon for the one as for the other. It is not impoſſible that the number of both may be diminiſhed in ſome future time, but when that time ſhall come, is not for us to ſay.

It may be ſuggeſted, that it is a circumſtance not much in favour either of the doctrines of the trinity, or of chriſtianity, that ſuch a number of philoſophers and learned men ſuſpect them. But unfavourable as this circumſtance

* *Lett. to a Phil. Unb.* Vol. II. p. 32.

may appear to ſome, there are others who view it in a very different light. The late Mr. *Robinſon* of Cambridge always contended, that common chriſtians were in a more favourable ſtate for the diſcovery of religious truth, than either the rich or the learned. And Dr. Prieſtley not only admits, but accounts for it. "Learned "men (he ſays) have *prejudices* peculiar to "themſelves; and the very affectation of being "free from vulgar prejudice, and of being "wiſer than the reſt of mankind, muſt indiſ- "poſe them to the admiſſion even of truth, if it "ſhould happen to be with the common peo- "ple." If *not many wiſe men after the fleſh* are found among the friends of chriſtianity, or of what we account its peculiar doctrines, is it any other than what might have been alleged againſt the primitive church? The things of God in their times were *hid from the wiſe and prudent, and revealed unto babes,* and that becauſe it ſeemed *good in his ſight.*

It is further worthy of notice, that the ſame *diſregard of religion in general,* which is allowed by our opponents to be favourable to ſocinianiſm, is equally favourable to deiſm. Dr. *Prieſtley* deſcribes unbelievers of a certain age amongſt us, as "having heard chriſtianity from "their infancy, as having in general believed it

" for ſome time, and *as not coming to diſbelieve* " *it till they had long diſregarded it.*"* A diſregard of chriſtianity, then, preceeded their openly rejecting it, and embracing the ſcheme of infidelity. Now this is the very proceſs of a great number of ſocinian converts, as both the doctor and Mr. Belſham elſewhere acknowledge. It is by a diſregard of all religion that men become infidels; and it is by the ſame means that others become ſocinians.

The foregoing obſervations may ſuffice to ſhew the *reſemblance* of ſocinianiſm to deiſm. It remains for me to conſider the *tendency* of the one to the other.

Dr. Prieſtley ſeems to admit that his ſcheme approaches nearer to that of unbelievers than ours; but then he diſowns its having any tendency on that account to lead men to infidelity. On the contrary, he retorts the charge upon his opponents, and aſſerts his own ſcheme to have an oppoſite effect, " An enemy, as I am " conſidered to chriſtianity, by ſome, (ſays he) " I have ſaved many from that infidelity into " which the bigots are forcing them." The caſe of the late Mr. Robinſon is here introduced as an example to confirm this aſſertion. The reaſoning of Dr. Prieſtley on this ſubject reſembles

* *Lett. to a Phil. Unb.* Vol. II. pref. p. ix.

that of Abp. *Laud* on another. When accuſed of leaning to popery, he denied the charge, and gave in a liſt of *twenty-one* perſons whom he had not merely ſaved from going over to that religion, but actually *converted* them from it to the proteſtant faith.* Yet few thinking people imagine the principles of *Laud* to have been very unfriendly to popery; much leſs that they were adapted to ſave men from it.

That ſocinianiſm has a direct tendency to deiſm, will appear from the following conſiderations. Firſt: By giving up the plenary inſpiration of the ſcriptures, and allowing them to be the production of fallible men, (of men who, though too honeſt knowingly to impoſe upon others, were, notwithſtanding, ſo far under the influence of inattention, of prejudice, and of miſinformation, as to be capable of being impoſed upon themſelves) ſocinians furniſh infidels with a handle for rejecting them.—To give up the plenary inſpiration of the ſcriptures, is to give them up as *the word of God*, and as *binding upon the conſciences of men*: to which our opponents apparently have no objection. They are ſeldom, if ever, known to warn mankind that the rejection of the holy ſcriptures will endanger their eternal welfare.

* See *Neale's Hiſt. of the Puritans*, Vol. III. Index, Art. Laud.

Nor can they do ſo conſiſtently with what they elſewhere plead for, that "all differences in "modes of worſhip may be only different modes "of endeavouring to honour and obey our com-"mon Parent." Under the pretence of appealing to the *reaſon* of unbelievers, they neglect to addreſs themſelves to their hearts and conſciences. If the cauſe of infidelity lie in the want of evidence, or if thoſe who leaned towards it, were ingenuous and diſintereſted enquirers after truth, ſolemn warnings might be leſs neceſſary. But if it lie in the temper of their hearts, which blinds their minds to the moſt convincing proofs; their hearts and conſciences muſt be addreſſed, as well as their underſtandings. The ſacred writers and preachers always proceeded upon this principle. This only will account for ſuch language as the following: *The blindneſs of their* HEART—*Leſt they ſhould underſtand with their* HEART, *and be converted*—REPENT *and believe the goſpel*—*If God peradventure, will give them* REPENTANCE *to the acknowledging of the truth.* This was the method of John the Baptiſt, of Chriſt, and his apoſtles, in their addreſſes to unbelievers: and whatever addreſſes are made to infidels, whether jews or deiſts, in which the *ſin* of unbelief and the *danger* of perſiſting in it, are not inſiſted on, they will tend to harden them in infidelity, rather than to recover them out of

it. Dr. Prieſtley in effect acknowledges, that the cauſe of infidelity lies in the temper of the heart; and yet, when he addreſſes himſelf to infidels, he ſeems to conſider them as merely in want of evidence, and foſters in them an idea of their ſecurity, notwithſtanding their rejection of the goſpel. This is manifeſtly the tendency of his *Letters to the philoſophers and politicians of France.*

Dr. Prieſtley acknowledges, that men *ſeldom reject chriſtianity in theory, till they have long diſregarded it in practice.** That is, they ſeldom believe it to be falſe, without their hearts being fully inclined to have it ſo. Let us then conſider a character of this deſcription in his examination of chriſtianity. He has long diſregarded the practice of it, and begins now to heſitate about its truth. If he read a defence of it upon our principles, he will find the authority of heaven vindicated; his own ſceptical ſpirit condemned; and is warned that he fall not upon a rock that will prove his eternal ruin. He throws it aſide in reſentment; calls the writer a bigot; and conſiders the *warning* given him, as an inſult to his dignity. Still, however, there is a ſting left behind, which he knows not how to extract; a ſomething which ſays within him,

* *Lett. to a Phil. Unb.* Vol. II. pref. p. ix.

How, if it ſhould be true? He takes up a defence of chriſtianity upon ſocinian principles; ſuppoſe Dr. Prieſtley's *Letters to the philoſophers and politicians of France.* He is now brought to a better humour. Here is no *threatening;* no imminent danger. The ſting is extracted. The reaſoning in many parts is plauſible; but, having long wiſhed to diſbelieve chriſtianity, it makes little or no impreſſion upon him; eſpecially as it ſeems to be of no *great* conſequence if he do ſo. It is only rejecting that entirely, which profeſſed chriſtians reject in part. It is only throwing off the teſtimony and opinions of fallible men. What will be his next ſtep, is not very difficult to conjecture.

By allowing part of the goſpels to be *ſpurious,* ſocinian writers enable the *jews* to aſk, with an air of triumph, "How are we ſure that "the remainder is authentic?"* We are often told that the jews can never embrace what is called orthodox chriſtianity, becauſe of its inconſiſtency with one of the firſt principles of their religion, the *unity* of God. We do not aſk them, however, to give up the unity of God. On the contrary, we are fully perſuaded that our principles are entirely conſiſtent with it. But this is more than our opponents can ſay, with regard to the inſpiration of the ſcriptures; a prin-

* Mr. D. Levi's *Letters to Dr. Prieſtley,* p. 82.

ciple as ſacred, and as important with the jews, as the unity of God itſelf. Were they to embrace Dr. Prieſtley's notions of chriſtianity, they muſt give up this principle, and conſider their own ſacred writings in a much meaner light than they at preſent do. They have no conception of the old teſtament being a mere "authentic hiſtory of paſt tranſactions;" but profeſs to receive it as the very *word of God; the infallible rule of faith and practice.* Whenever they ſhall receive the new teſtament, there is reaſon to conclude it will be under the ſame character, and for the ſame purpoſes. While they conſider their own ſcriptures as divinely inſpired, and hear profeſſed chriſtians acknowledge, that "part of their goſpels is ſpurious;" they will be tempted to look down upon chriſtianity with ſcorn, and ſo be hardened in their infidelity.

Secondly: If the ſacred writings be not received for the purpoſes for which they were profeſſedly given, and for which they were actually appealed to by Chriſt and his apoſtles, they are in effect rejected: and thoſe who pretend to embrace them for other purpoſes, will themſelves be found to have paſſed the boundaries of chriſtianity, and to be walking in the paths of infidelity.—We have ſeen in Letter XII. that the ſcriptures *profeſs* to be *the word of God, and*

the rule of faith and practice. Now, if any man believe in revelation, he muſt receive it as being what it profeſſes to be, and for all the purpoſes for which it profeſſes to have been written. *The Monthly Review* ſuggeſts, that "the ſcriptures were never deſigned to ſettle "diſputed theories, or to decide ſpeculative "controverted queſtions even in religion and "morality."* But if ſo, what muſt we think of their aſſuming to be the rule of faith and practice? What muſt we think of Chriſt and his apoſtles, who appealed to them for the truth of their doctrines, and the goodneſs of their precepts? On the principles of our opponents, they muſt have been either weak or wicked. If they conſidered them as the ſtandard of faith and practice, they muſt have been weak. If they did not, and yet appealed to them as a deciſive teſt, they were certainly wicked. In either caſe, their teſtimony is unworthy of regard; which is downright infidelity.

Thirdly: By the degrading notions which ſocinians entertain of the perſon of Chriſt, they do what in them lies to leſſen the ſin of rejecting him; and afford the adverſaries of the goſpel a ground for accuſing him of preſumption; which muſt neceſſarily harden them in unbelief. —The *jews* conſider their nation, according to

* *Mon. Rev. Enlarged.* Vol. X. p. 357.

the ſentiments of orthodox chriſtians, as lying under the charge "of crucifying the LORD "and SAVIOUR of the world:" but, according to thoſe of Dr. Prieſtley, as only having crucified "a *prophet*, that was ſent to them in the firſt inſtance."* Such a conſideration diminiſhes the degree of their guilt; tends to render them more indifferent; and, conſequently, muſt harden them in infidelity.—By conſidering our Lord as *merely* a prophet, ſocinians alſo furniſh the jews with the charge of *preſumption;* a weighty objection, indeed, againſt his Meſſiahſhip! "He preached *himſelf*, (ſays Mr. Levi) "as *the light of the world;* which is an inſtance "not to be paralleled in ſcripture: for the duty of "a prophet conſiſted in his delivery of God's "word or meſſage to the people; not in pre-"ſumptuouſly preaching himſelf. Again, we "meet with the ſame example in John xiv. 6. "where Jeſus preaches *himſelf*, as *the way, the* "*truth, and the life.*" From all which he concludes; "It is manifeſt that he was not ſent by "God, to us as a prophet, ſeeing he was ſo "deficient in the eſſential character of a pro-"phet."†—How Dr. Prieſtley, upon his principles, will be able to anſwer this reaſoning, I cannot tell. Though he has written a reply to

* Mr. David Levi's *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, p. 14.
† Ibid, p. 24.

Mr. Levi, I obſerve he has paſſed over this part of the ſubject very lightly; offering nothing that ſufficiently accounts for our Lord's preaching himſelf as *the light of the world, the way, the truth, and the life,* upon the ſuppoſition of his being merely a prophet.

Fourthly: The progreſs which ſocinianiſm has made, has generally been towards infidelity.—The ancient ſocinians, though they went great lengths, are, nevertheleſs, far out-done by the moderns. If we look over the *Racovian Catechiſm,* printed at Amſterdam in 1652, we ſhall find ſuch ſentiments as the following. "No "ſuſpicion can poſſibly creep into the mind "concerning thoſe authors, (the ſacred writers) "as if they had not had exact congnizance of "the things which they deſcribed; in that ſome "of them were eye and ear witneſſes of the "things which they ſet down, and the others "were fully and accurately informed by them "concerning the ſame.—It is altogether incre-"dible, that God, whoſe goodneſs and provi-"dence are immenſe, hath ſuffered thoſe writ-"ings wherein he hath propoſed his will, and "the way to eternal life, and which through "the ſucceſſion of ſo many ages have by all "the godly been received and approved as "ſuch, to be any ways corrupted."* I need

* *Racov. Catechism,* p. 3, 4.

not go about to prove that theſe ſentiments are betrayed into the hands of infidels by modern ſocinians. Dr. Prieſtley, (as we have ſeen in Letter XII.) ſuppoſes the ſacred writers to have written upon ſubjects "to which they had not "given much attention, and concerning which "they had not the means of exact informa-"tion:" and, in ſuch caſes, conſiders himſelf at liberty to diſregard their productions. Inſtead of maintaining that the ſacred writings cannot have been corrupted, modern ſocinians are continually labouring to prove that they *are* ſo.

Some, who are better acquainted with ſocinians and deiſts than I profeſs to be, have obſerved, that it is very common for thoſe who go over to infidelity to paſs through ſocinianiſm in their way. If this be the caſe, it is no more than may be expected according to the natural courſe of things. It is not common, I believe, for perſons who go over to ſocinianiſm, to go directly from calviniſm, but through one or other of the different ſtages of arminianiſm, or arianiſm, or both. Dr. Prieſtley was once, as he himſelf informs us, "a calviniſt, and that "of the ſtraiteſt ſect. Afterwards, (he adds) "he became a high arian, next a low arian, "and then a ſocinian, and then in a little time "a ſocinian of the loweſt kind, in which "Chriſt is conſidered as a mere man, the ſon

" of Joſeph and Mary, and naturally as falli-
" ble and peccable as Moſes or any other pro-
" phet:" to which he might have added, and in which the plenary inſpiration of the ſcriptures is given up.* The doctor alſo informs us that he " does not know when his creed will be fixed." † And yet he tells us in his volume of Sermons, (page 95) that " unitarians are not apt to entertain any doubt of the truth of their principles." But this, I ſuppoſe, is to be underſtood of their principles only in one point of view; namely, as they are oppoſed to what is commonly called orthodoxy: for as they are oppoſed to infidelity they are apt to entertain doubts concerning them as much, and perhaps more, than any other men; and in that line of improvement to hold themſelves open to the reception of greater and greater illuminations. It is in this direction that Dr. Prieſtley has generally moved hitherto; and ſhould he, before he fixes his creed, go one degree further, is there any doubt where that degree will land him? Should it be upon the ſhores of downright infidelity, it can afford no greater matter of ſurpriſe to the chriſtian world, than that of an arian becoming a ſocinian, or a deiſt an atheiſt.

By the following extract from a letter, which I received from a gentleman of can-

* *Letters to a Phil. Unb.* Pt. II. p. 33—35.
† *Def. of Unit. for* 1787, p. 111.

dour and veracity, and extenſive acquaintance in the literary world, it appears that ſeveral of the moſt eminent characters amongſt profeſſed unbelievers, in the preſent age, were but a few years ago in the ſcheme of Socinus: "I "think I may ſay without exaggeration, that "of my acquaintance the greater part of *lite-* "*rary* men who have become unitarians, are "either ſceptics, or ſtrongly tending that way. "I could inſtance in — — — — — — "and many others. About four months ago, "I had a pretty long converſation with one of "the above gentlemen (as intelligent a man "as any I know) on this ſubject. He re- "minded me of a converſation that had paſſed "betwixt us about a year and a half before, "in which I had obſerved, there was a near "affinity between unitarianiſm and deiſm; "and told me he was then rather ſurpriſed I "ſhould ſuppoſe ſo, but that now he was com- "pletely of that opinion; and that, from very "extenſive obſervations, there was nothing he "was more certain of, than that the one led "to the other. He remarked how much Dr. "Prieſtley was miſtaken in ſuppoſing he could, "by caſhiering orthodoxy, form, what he cal- "led, rational chriſtians; for that after follow- "ing him thus far, they would be almoſt ſure "to carry their ſpeculations to a ſtill greater "extent. All the profeſſed unbelievers I have

" met with, rejoice in the ſpread of unitarian-
" iſm, as favourable to their views."

Chriſtian brethren, permit me to requeſt that the ſubject may be ſeriouſly conſidered. Whether the foregoing poſitions be ſufficiently proved, it becomes not me to decide. A reflection or two, however, may be offered upon ſuppoſition that they are ſo, and with theſe I ſhall conclude.

Firſt: If that ſyſtem which embraces the deity and atonement of Chriſt, with other correſpondent doctrines, be friendly to a life of ſobriety, righteouſneſs, and godlineſs; it muſt be of God, and it becomes us to abide by it; not becauſe it is the doctrine of Calvin, or of any other man that was uninſpired, but as being *The goſpel which we have received* from Chriſt and his apoſtles; *wherein we ſtand, and by which we are ſaved.*

Secondly: If that ſyſtem of religion which rejects the deity and atonement of Chriſt, with other correſpondent doctrines, be unfriendly to the converſion of ſinners to a life of holineſs, and of profeſſed unbelievers to faith in Chriſt; if it be a ſyſtem which irreligious men are the firſt, and ſerious chriſtians the laſt to embrace; if it be found to relax the obligations to virtuous affection and behaviour, by relax-

ing the great ſtandard of virtue itſelf; if it promote neither love to God under his true character, nor benevolence to men, as it is exemplified in the ſpirit of Chriſt and of his apoſtles; if it lead thoſe who embrace it to be wiſe in their own eyes, and inſtead of humbly deprecating God's righteous diſpleaſure, even in their dying moments, arrogantly to challenge his juſtice; if the charity which it inculcates be founded in an indifference to divine truth; if it be inconſiſtent with ardent love to Chriſt, and veneration for the holy ſcriptures; if the happineſs which it promotes be at variance with the joys of the goſpel; and, finally, if it diminiſh the motives to gratitude, obedience, and heavenly-mindedneſs, and have a natural tendency to infidelity; it muſt be an immoral ſyſtem, and conſequently not of God. It is not the goſpel of Chriſt, but *another goſpel.* Thoſe who preach it, preach *another Jeſus,* whom the apoſtles did not preach; and thoſe who receive it, receive *another ſpirit*, which they never imbibed. It is not the light which cometh from above, but a cloud of darkneſs that hath ariſen from beneath, tending to eclipſe it. It is not the high-way of truth, which is a way of holineſs, but a bye-path of error, which miſleads the unwary traveller; and of which, as we value our immortal intereſts, it

becomes us to beware. We need not be afraid of evidence, or of free enquiry. For, if irreligious men be the first, and serious christians be the last, who embrace the socinian system; it is easy to perceive, that the avenues which lead to it are not, as its abettors would persuade you to think, an openness to conviction, or a free and impartial enquiry after truth; but *a heart secretly disaffected to the true character and government of God, and dissatisfied with the gospel-way of salvation.*

I am,

Christian Brethren,

Respectfully and Affectionately,

Your's,

ANDREW FULLER.

POSTSCRIPT.

ON the firſt appearance of the foregoing Letters in 1793, ſome of the moſt reſpectable characters amongſt the ſocinians, and who have ſince affected to treat them with contempt, acknowledged that they were "well worthy of their attention." No anſwer, however, appeared to them till 1796, when Dr. Toulmin publiſhed his *Practical efficacy of the unitarian doctrine*, and Mr. Kentiſh his Sermon, on *The moral tendency of the genuine chriſtian doctrine.* To theſe publications a reply was written in 1797, entitled, *Socinianiſm indefenſible, on the ground of its moral tendency.* Mr. Kentiſh wrote again, and Dr. Toulmin has lately publiſhed a ſecond edition of his piece, with large additions.—I had no inclination to add any thing in reply to Mr. Kentiſh, being well ſatisfied that the public ſhould judge from the evidence that was before them. And as to Dr. Toulmin, his ſecond edition is like his firſt, full of irrelative matter.

Having been charged with *ſhifting the ground of the argument, and begging the queſtion*, this writer labours to perſuade his readers

that he has done neither. " He did not in-
" tend, (he ſays) nor profeſs to give a *full* and
" *minute* anſwer to Mr. Fuller's tract. He
" meant not *much more* than to take an *occaſion*
" from that publication to bring the general
" queſtion, namely, the practical efficacy of
" the unitarian doctrine, to the teſt of ſcrip-
" tural facts."* This is acknowledging, that *if he had* profeſſed to give a proper anſwer to the work, he would have been obliged by the laws of juſt reaſoning to keep to the ground of his opponent. But intending only to write a piece that ſhould bear ſome *alluſion* to it, he conſidered himſelf at liberty to chooſe his own ground. But if this were his intention, Why did he profeſs, at his outſet, to " enter the liſts" with me; and to comprehend in his performance " the main point to which a reply to my Letters need be directed?" If this be not profeſſing to anſwer a work, nothing is.

The deſign of Dr. Toulmin ſeems to have been very complex, and his account of it has much the appearance of evaſion. He did not intend to give a *full* and *minute* anſwer: Did he mean to give *any* anſwer; or only to write a piece which might *paſs for* an *anſwer?* He meant not *much more* than thus and thus: Did

* *Practical Efficacy*, p. 133. sec. ed.

he mean *any* more? If he did, he ought to have kept to the proper ground of reaſoning; or, if he thought it unfair, to have proved it ſo.

But he had a right, he ſays, to chooſe the ground of his argument, as well as I. Doubtleſs, if he had choſen to write upon any ſubject, *without profeſſing to anſwer another*, or wiſhing his performance to paſs for an anſwer, he had: but if at the outſet he propoſe to "enter the liſts" with an opponent, and to comprehend "all that to which a reply to his performance need be directed," it is otherwiſe. If a chriſtian divine wiſh to write in favour of chriſtianity, he is at liberty to chooſe his ground. He may fix, as Bp. Newton has, on the argument from *prophecy*. But if a deiſt come after him, profeſſing to "enter the liſts" with him, and to comprehend in his performance "all that to which a reply to the work of his opponent need be directed," he is obliged by the rules of juſt reaſoning, either to examine the arguments of his adverſary, or attempt to overturn the principle on which they reſt. If, inſtead of trying the truth of the chriſtian religion by the fulfilment of *prophecy*, he were to fill up his pages by arguing on the improbability of *miracles* or *the ſufficiency of the light of nature*, What would Dr. Toulmin ſay to him? And if in order to excuſe himſelf, he ſhould allege that

he did not intend, nor profeſs to give a *full* and *minute* anſwer to his antagoniſt; that he meant not *much more* than to take an *occaſion* from his publication to bring forward the general queſtion between chriſtians and deiſts, on the neceſſity of a divine revelation, Might he not better have held his peace? Muſt not judicious perſons, even amongſt his friends, clearly perceive that he has betrayed the cauſe; and whether they chooſe to acknowledge it, or not, be fully convinced that if he did not wiſh to anſwer the work, he ſhould have let it alone; or if the ground of argument were unfair, he ſhould have proved it ſo, and not have ſet up another which had no relation to it?

Thus it is, that Dr. Toulmin has *ſhifted the ground of the argument:* and what is that ground to which he gives the preference? He wiſhed, it ſeems, to try "the practical efficacy of the "unitarian doctrine by the teſt of ſcriptural "facts." Are thoſe facts then a proper medium for ſuch a trial? I have been uſed to think that every tree was to be tried by its *own* fruits, and not by thoſe of another. *Scriptural facts*, ſuch as thoſe which Dr. Toulmin alleges, afford a proper teſt of the practical efficacy of *ſcripture doctrines;* and if brought againſt the cauſe of infidelity, would be in point. But there is no queſtion in this caſe, whether ſcripture truth be

of a practical nature, but wherein it conſiſts? The *facts* to which Dr. Toulmin wiſhes to draw the readers attention prove nothing in favour of unitarianiſm, or trinitarianiſm: for before they can be brought to bear, the work of proof muſt be accompliſhed by other means. An attempt to eſtabliſh the practical efficacy of modern unitarianiſm by ſcriptural facts, is like producing the fruits of Paleſtine in order to aſcertain the ſoil of Taunton.

Dr. Toulmin complained of my animadverting on particular paſſages in the writings of unitarians, and ſuggeſted that I ought rather to have applied my arguments to the general, the fundamental principles of their ſyſtem; "That there is *one* God, the Father, and one "Mediator between God and man, the *man* "Chriſt Jeſus." To this it was anſwered, 'The 'unity of God, and the humanity of Chriſt, 'then it ſeems, are the principles which I 'ought to have attacked; that is, I ought to 'have attacked principles which I profeſs to be-'lieve, and not thoſe which I profeſs to diſbe-'lieve."—"But (ſays Dr. T. in reply) does he "receive theſe principles in the *pure and ſimple* "*form* in which unitarians embrace them?"*

The doctor ought to have expreſſed his fundamental principles *in his own words*, and not

* Page 81. Note.

in thoſe of ſcripture. Every controverſial writer, who does not wiſh to beg the queſtion, will do ſo. He ought to have ſaid, Mr. Fuller, inſtead of animadverting on particular paſſages in the writings of unitarians, ſhould have attacked their firſt principles; That God is *one perſon*, and that Chriſt is *merely a man*. This had been fair and open: and had the objection been made in this form, I might have replied to this effect:—My object was not to attack particular principles, ſo much as the general tendency of their religion, taken in the groſs; and the paſſages on which I animadverted, chiefly related to this view of the ſubject. Yet, in the courſe of the work, I have certainly attempted to prove *the divinity of Chriſt;* and whatever goes to eſtabliſh this doctrine, goes to demoliſh thoſe leading principles which, it is ſaid, I ought to have attacked: for if Chriſt be God, he cannot be *merely* a man, and there muſt be more than *one perſon* in the Godhead.—But not contented with expreſſing his leading principles in his own words, Dr. Toulmin chooſes ſcripture language for the purpoſe. This, I contended, was begging the queſtion; or taking it for granted that the terms *one God*, in ſcripture, mean *one perſon*, and that Chriſt's being called *a man*, denotes that he was *merely* a man. To ſhew the impropriety of this proceeding, I alleged, that I believed both the unity of God,

and the humanity of Chriſt; and therefore ought not to be expected to oppoſe either of them. "But does he receive theſe principles "(ſays Dr. T.) in the *pure and ſimple form* in "which unitarians embrace them?" What is this but ſaying, that I do not admit the ſocinian *gloſs* upon the apoſtle's words? Dr. Toulmin may contend, that the ſcriptures expreſs his ſentiments ſo plainly as to need no gloſs: but a gloſs it manifeſtly is. He may call it *a pure and ſimple form*, or what he pleaſes; but nothing is meant by it beyond a gloſs, nor proved, except the prevalence of his eaſy-beſetting ſin, that of begging the queſtion.

To ſhew in a ſtill ſtronger light the unfairneſs of a controverſial writer's attempting to ſhroud his opinions under the phraſeology of ſcripture, I ſuppoſed it to be done by a calviniſt, and aſked what Dr. Toulmin would ſay to it in that caſe? I could ſay for example, *There is a Father, a Son, and a holy Spirit*, in whoſe name we are baptiſed—*The Word was God—Chriſt died for our ſins, according to the ſcriptures;* and could require ſocinians not to animadvert on particular paſſages in calviniſtic writers, but on *theſe our leading principles.* Would they admit, or ought they to be expected to admit of theſe as our leading principles? No: Dr. Toulmin has given proof that

he does not, and has thereby juſtified me in refuſing to admit the ſame thing on his ſide of the queſtion. He will not allow that our leading principles are expreſſed by theſe paſſages of ſcripture, becauſe they ſay nothing of the Father, Son, and Spirit being *one God*, nor of a *ſameneſs of eſſence*, &c. &c.* Very well: Neither do I allow that his leading principles are expreſſed by the paſſages he has produced; for they ſay nothing of God's being *one perſon*, or of Chriſt's being *merely* a man. If the ſcriptures which I alleged, expreſs my ſentiments *as fully* as the paſſages he has produced expreſs his, that is ſufficient. My object was not to join iſſue in endeavouring to prove that my ſentiments were expreſsly and fully contained in ſcripture language; but to ſhew the futility of ſuch pretences on either ſide. So far from "affecting to ſhew that the firſt "principles of the calviniſts are to be expreſs-"ed in the words of ſcripture," it was manifeſtly my deſign to ſhew that the practice of ſo expreſſing them *in controverſy*, was objectionable, in that it takes for granted that which requires to be proved.

It is true, as Dr. Toulmin ſays, that if he, or any other perſon, were to offer to ſubſcribe the paſſages which I have produced, as

* Pages 5, 6. Note.

exhibiting a creed tantamount to ours, we ſhould demur to admit it in this view. But this, inſtead of overturning my reaſoning, confirms it, and cuts the throat of his own argument; for it is no leſs true that if I, or any other perſon, were to offer to ſubſcribe the paſſages produced by him, as exhibiting a creed tantamount to his, he would demur to admit it in this view. Nay more: in his caſe it is beyond ſuppoſition. I have actually offered to ſubſcribe the apoſtle's words, and he has actually refuſed to admit my ſubſcription, alleging, that I do not receive them in that *pure and ſimple form* in which unitarians embrace them. According to his own reaſoning, therefore, the words of the apoſtle by which he would expreſs his leading principles, do not contain the *whole* of them, and he muſt have failed in his attempt to expreſs them in ſcripture language; and conſequently, the "boaſted ſuperiority" of his ſcheme, even in this reſpect, is without foundation.

If we can believe Dr. Toulmin, however, the ſcriptures not only expreſsly declare God to be one, but *one perſon*. "This ſimple idea "of God, that he is one ſingle perſon, (ſays "he from Mr. Lindſey) literally pervades every "paſſage of the ſacred volumes." To this I have anſwered, among other things, 'It might

'have ſerved a better purpoſe, if, inſtead of 'this general aſſertion, theſe gentlemen had 'pointed us to *a ſingle* inſtance in which the 'unity of God is literally declared to be per-'ſonal.' And what has Dr. Toulmin ſaid in reply? "The appeal, one would think, might "be made to Mr. Fuller's own good ſenſe. "What can be more deciſive inſtances of this "than the many paſſages in which the ſingu-"lar perſonal pronouns, and their correlates "are uſed concerning the ſupreme Being; as "*I, me, my, mine, &c.*"* Whatever may be thought of my good ſenſe, or of that of my opponent, I appeal to good ſenſe itſelf, whether he have made good his aſſertion. To ſay nothing of his reducing it from *every paſſage*, to *many* paſſages, which probably ſtrikes out ninety-nine paſſages out of a hundred in the ſacred volumes; If the ſingular perſonal pronouns be a literal declaration that God is one perſon, the plural perſonal pronouns, Let *us* make man in *our* image, &c., muſt equally be a literal declaration that he is more than one. The ſingular perſonal pronouns alſo which are frequently applied to the holy Spirit,† contain a deciſive proof, yea, a literal declaration of his perſonality; and which inevitably draws after it the doctrine of the trinity.

* Page 85. Note.

† John xiv. 26. xv. 26. xvi. 7—15. 1 Cor. xii. 11.

Dr. Toulmin has ſaid much about *judging the heart*, (pp. 95—101, Note:) but his objection does not ſeem to lie againſt judging, ſo much as judging unitarians. If I affirm what the ſcriptures uniformly teach,* That a falſe and immoral ſyſtem has its origin not in ſimple miſtake, but in diſaffection to God,† this is highly preſumptuous, this is judging the heart: but if Dr. Toulmin pronounce my mode of arguing to be "favouring of ſpleen and ill-nature, and "evidently *deſigned* to fix an opprobrium and "diſgrace," (p. 134) the caſe is altered.

It is right to judge of the diſpoſition of the heart by "overt acts;" that is, by words and deeds: but where this judgment is directed againſt unitarians, it is not right after all; for it is poſſible we may judge uncandidly and unjuſtly! It is right for Dr. T. to diſregard the profeſſion of his opponent, when he declares his belief in the unity of God, and the humanity of Chriſt, and expreſſes that belief in the words of ſcripture, becauſe he does not "re-"ceive theſe principles in *the pure and ſimple* "*form* in which unitarians embrace them."

* 2 Theſs. ii. 10, 11. 2 Pet. ii. 1.
1 John iv. 6. Jude 4.

† The reader will recollect that what is affirmed at the close of the Letters is merely hypothetical, and reſts upon the ſuppoſition of ſocinianism being what I had attempted to prove it—a falſe and immoral ſyſtem.

But if we diſregard *their* profeſſions, and require any thing more than a declaration of their faith in the words of ſcripture, we ſet up "*our* goſpel, or the goſpel according to *our views* of it;" and act contrary to our profeſſed principles as proteſtants, as diſſenters, and as baptiſts.

When our creed and worſhip are ſuch that they cannot conſcientiouſly join them, they have a right to ſeparate from us, otherwiſe they could not "keep the commandments of Jeſus pure and undefiled:" But whatever be their creed, or the tenor of their converſation, or prayers, we have no right to refuſe communion with them.

If we do not model our profeſſions, preaching, and worſhip, ſo as to give no offence to an individual of their principles, we "aſſume a "power which no chriſtian, or body of chriſ- "tians poſſeſſes:" yet they do not model their profeſſions, preaching, or worſhip, ſo as to give no offence to us; nor do we deſire they ſhould. They do not confine themſelves to the words of ſcripture; nor is it neceſſary they ſhould. They inquire whether our profeſſions accord with the *meaning* of ſcripture; and we claim to do the ſame. The reaſon why Dr. T. will not allow of this and other claims, muſt, I ſhould think, be this: Their views of the goſpel are "*pure* and *ſimple*," and ours are *corrupt*. Thus it is, reader,

that he goes about to prove that he does not "take for granted the principles on which he "argues," and that "he aſſumes nothing!"— If Dr. T. can perſuade himſelf and his friends, that he has not ſhifted the ground of the argument, has not aſſumed what he ſhould have proved, and in ſhort, has not tacitly acknowledged ſocinianiſm to be indefenſible on the ground of its moral tendency, they are welcome to all the conſolation ſuch a perſuaſion will afford them.

All I ſhall add will be, a brief defence of the *principle* on which the foregoing Letters are written. To undermine this, is a point at which all my opponents have aimed. The practical efficacy of a doctrine *in the preſent age* is a ſubject, it ſeems, which ought not to be diſcuſſed as the teſt of its being true. They are to a man, however, againſt it: a pretty clear evidence this, that it does not ſpeak good concerning them.

Mr. Belſham, in his *Review of Mr. Wilberforce*, glancing at *The ſyſtems compared*, ſays, "The amount of it is; we calvinists being "much better chriſtians than you ſocinians, "our doctrines muſt of courſe be true."— "The unitarians (he adds) will not treſpaſs "upon the holy ground. We have learned "that *not he who commendeth himſelf is approv-*

" *ed, but whom the Lord commendeth.*" And, " Be it known to Mr. Wilberforce, and to all " who like him are diſpoſed to condemn their " brethren unheard, that if the unitarians were " inclined to boaſt, they have whereof to glory. " And if they took pleaſure in expoſing the " faults of their orthodox brethren, they like- " wiſe have tales to unfold which would re- " flect little credit on the parties, or on their " principles. But of ſuch mutual reproaches " there would be no end."*

Dr. Toulmin alleges that " It is a mode " of arguing very unfavourable to *candour*, " and fair diſcuſſion, favouring of *ſpleen* and " *ill-nature*, principally calculated to *miſrepre-* " *ſent* and *irritate*, and evidently deſigned to " fix an approbrium and diſgrace"—that when our Saviour cautioned his followers to *beware of falſe prophets*, who ſhould be *known by their fruits*, he meant not perſons who would teach *falſe doctrine*, and whoſe lives would accord with it; but perſons of inſincere *character*, whoſe doctrine might nevertheleſs be true—and that his brethren have not reaſoned againſt calviniſm from the immoral *lives* of calviniſts, but merely from the immoral *tendency* of their principles.†

If the mode of arguing purſued in the foregoing Letters be liable to all theſe objections,

* Pp. 267, 268, 274. † Pp. 134, 148, 154.

It is rather ſingular that it ſhould not have been objected to till it was pointed againſt ſocinianiſm. If it can be ſhewn to be a mode of arguing conſonant to the directions given by our Saviour, and actually uſed by the apoſtles, the fathers, the reformers, the puritans, and even by our opponents themſelves, their objecting to it in this inſtance will prove nothing, except it be the weakneſs of their cauſe.

Our Saviour warned his followers to *beware of falſe prophets*, and gave this direction concerning them: *Ye ſhall know them by their fruits.** This direction, founded in ſelf-evident truth, and enforced by the head of the chriſtian church, appeared to me to furniſh a proper criterion by which to judge of the claims, if not of every particular opinion, yet of every *ſyſtem* of opinions, pretending to divine authority.

Mr. Kentiſh admitted that "The effects "produced by a doctrine was a proper criterion "of its *value*, but not of its *truth*." But the value of a doctrine implies its truth. Falſehood is of no value: whatever proves a doctrine valuable, therefore, muſt prove it to be true.

Mr. Kentiſh farther objects: "This cele-"brated ſaying of our Saviour is propoſed as a

* Matt. vii. 15—20.

" teſt of *character*, and not as a criterion of " *opinion.*" To the ſame purpoſe Dr. *Toulmin* alleges, that " This a rule given to judge not " concerning *principles*, but *men*; not concern- " ing the ſentiments promulgated by them, " but concerning their own characters and pre- " tenſions.—The perſons here pointed at are " hypocrites and falſe prophets; ſuch as would " falſely pretend a commiſſion from God. Their " pretenſions might be blended with a *true* " *doctrine;* but their claims were founded in " diſſimulation. They would be diſcovered by " their covetouſneſs, love of gain, and laſci- " viouſneſs." p. 148.

Theſe writers are in general exceedingly averſe to judging *men*, conſidering it as uncandid, and preſumptuous, and plead for confining all judgment to *things:* but in this caſe *things* ſeem to be in danger, and therefore *men* are left to ſhift for themſelves.

According to this expoſition, it is the duty of chriſtians, when miniſters diſcover an avaricious and ambitious diſpoſition, though found in doctrine, and in time paſt apparently humble and pious, to ſet them down as hypocrites. And this is more *candid*, it ſeems, and favours leſs of *ſpleen* and *ill-nature*, than drawing an unfavourable concluſion of their doctrinal principles.

But waving this: The ſaying of our Saviour is given as a teſt of *falſe* prophets, or teachers; an epithet never beſtowed, I believe, on men whoſe doctrine was *true*. That falſe prophets and teachers were men of bad character, I admit, though that character was not always apparent:* but that they are ever ſo denominated on account of their character, as diſtinct from their doctrine, does not appear. When any thing is ſaid of their doctrine, it is invariably deſcribed as falſe. *If any man ſhall ſay unto you, lo here is Chriſt, or lo there,* BELIEVE HIM NOT: *for falſe Chriſts, and* FALSE PROPHETS, bearing witneſs in their favour, *ſhall ariſe—There were* FALSE PROPHETS *among the people, even as there ſhall be* FALSE TEACHERS *among you, who privily ſhall bring in* DAMNABLE HERESIES, *even* DENYING THE LORD THAT BOUGHT THEM, *and bring upon themſelves ſwift deſtruction—Beloved, believe not every ſpirit, but try the ſpirits whether they be of God: becauſe many* FALSE PROPHETS *are gone out into the world—Every ſpirit that* CONFESSETH NOT THAT JESUS CHRIST IS COME IN THE FLESH, *is not of God—Whoſoever tranſgreſſeth, and abideth not in the* DOCTRINE OF CHRIST, *hath not God—If there come any unto you, and bring not* THIS DOCTRINE, *receive*

* 2 Cor. xi. 14. Matt. vii. 15.

*him not into your houſe, neither bid him God-ſpeed: for he that biddeth him God ſpeed is partaker of his evil deeds.**

If the *falſe prophets* deſcribed by our Saviour were ſuch as might teach "a true doctrine," the deſcriptions given by the new-teſtament writers, uniformly repreſenting them as teaching falſehood, are at variance with thoſe of their maſter.

That there were hypocrites who taught a true doctrine, may be allowed: but they are never denominated *falſe prophets, or falſe teachers.* Balaam was a wicked character, and is called *a prophet;* but as the ſubject matter of his prophecies were true, he is not called a *falſe* prophet. Judas alſo was a hypocrite and a thief, at the ſame time that he was a preacher and an apoſtle; but as what he taught was true, he is not deſcribed as a *falſe* teacher, or a *falſe* apoſtle.

Theſe things conſidered, let the impartial reader determine, Whether our Saviour did not mean to direct his followers to judge by their fruits, *who were the patrons of falſe doctrine?*

With reſpect to the *uſe* which has been made of this direction, I appeal to the firſt

* Mark xiii. 21, 22. 2 Pet. ii. 1. 1 John iv. 1—3. 2 John 10, 11.

place to the *apoſtles*, and new-teſtament writers. I preſume they will not be accuſed of ſelf-commendation, nor of ſpleen and ill-nature; yet they ſcrupled not to repreſent thoſe who believed their doctrine as *waſhed* and *ſanctified* from their former immoralities; and thoſe who believed it not as *having pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs.** All thoſe *facts* which Dr. Toulmin has endeavoured to preſs into the ſervice of modern unitarianiſm are evidences of the truth of the primitive doctrine, and were conſidered as ſuch by the new-teſtament writers. They appealed to the effects produced in the lives of believers as *living epiſtles, known and read of all men,* in proof that they *had not corrupted the word of God,* but were the true miniſters of Chriſt.† With the fulleſt confidence they aſked, *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jeſus is the Son of God?*‡ Plainly intimating that truth was well known by its effects. Nor was error leſs ſo: thoſe who introduced falſe doctrines are invariably deſcribed as unholy characters.§

To quote the reaſonings of the *fathers* on this principle, were to copy a large proportion of their *apologies.* I queſtion whether there be

* 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. 2 Theſs. ii. 12. † 2 Cor. ii. 17. iii. 1—3.
‡ 1 John v. 5. § 2 Pet. ii. 1—3. Jude. 1 Cor. xv. 33, 34.

one of them which does not contain arguments for the truth of chriſtianity on the ground of the holy lives of chriſtians; and which does not infer, or in ſome form intimate, the falſehood of heatheniſm from the known immorality of heathens. Their opponents having no better anſwer at hand, might poſſibly charge this reaſoning with vain boaſting, ſpleen, and ill-nature: but I do not recollect that it was ever imputed to theſe cauſes by chriſtians.

As to the *reformers*, the moſt ſucceſsful attacks which they made upon the church of Rome, were founded on the diſſolute lives of her clergy, and the holineſs and conſtancy of thoſe whom ſhe perſecuted unto death. The general ſtrain of their writings may be ſeen in Fox's Martyrology, which is in effect an exhibition of the moral character of the perſecutors and the perſecuted, from which the world is left to judge which was the true religion: and I may add, a conſiderable part of the world did judge, and acted accordingly.

Dr. Toulmin ſuggeſts from *Moſheim*, that the reformers, and particularly Calvin and his aſſociates, neglected the ſcience of morals.* But Mosheim's prejudices againſt Calvin and his aſſociates renders his teſtimony of but little weight, eſpecially as the reader may ſatisfy

* p. 153.

himſelf of the contrary by the writings of the parties, which are yet extant. The eighth chapter of the ſecond book of *Calvin's Inſtitutes* is ſufficient to wipe away this ſlander. The morality there inculcated is ſuch as neither antinomians, nor "great numbers" amongſt modern unitarians, can endure. That there were ſome among the *goſpellers*, as they were called, who were looſe characters, is admitted: ſuch there are in every age: but take the reformed as a body, and they were not only better chriſtians than their perſecutors, but than thoſe their ſucceſſors, who, while pretending to teach the "ſcience" of morality, have deſerted the great principles by which it requires to be animated, and debaſed it by allowing the amuſements of the theatre, and other ſpecies of diſſipation to be conſiſtent with it.

The hiſtorian of the *puritans* has recorded of that perſecuted people, that "While others "were at plays and interludes, at revels, or "walking in the fields, or at the diverſions of "bowling, fencing &c. on the evening of the "ſabbath, they, with their families, were em-"ployed in reading the ſcriptures, ſinging pſalms, "catechiſing their children, repeating ſermons, "and prayer—That neither was this confined "to the Lord's day, but they had their hours "of family devotion on the week-days, eſteem-

" ing it their duty to take care of the ſouls " as well as of the bodies of their ſervants— " and that they were circumſpect as to all the " exceſſes of eating and drinking, apparel and " lawful diverſions; being frugal in houſe-keep- " ing, induſtrious in their particular callings, " honeſt and exact in their dealings, and ſoli- " citous to give to every one his own."*

Theſe things might not be alleged in proof of the truth of every particular opinion which they held; neither have I inferred from ſuch premiſes the truth of every opinion maintained by Calviniſts: but they were alleged in proof that their religion in the main *was that of Jeſus Chriſt*, and the religion of their adverſaries *a very near approach to that of antichriſt.* Nor do I recollect that the writer has been charged, unleſs it be by thoſe who felt the condemnation which his ſtory implied, with vain-boaſting, ſpleen, or ill-nature.

Finally: Will our opponents accuſe *themſelves* of theſe evils for having reaſoned upon this principle as far as they are able? That they have done this is manifeſt, though Dr. Toulmin affects to diſown it, alleging, that they have not reaſoned on the *lives* of men, but merely on the *tendency* of principles.† That

* Neale's *Hiſt.* Vol. I. Chap. viii. † Page 104.

they have reaſoned on the tendency of principles, is true; and ſo have I: ſuch is the reaſoning of the far greater part of the foregoing Letters. But that they avoided all reference to the *lives* of calviniſts, is not true. Was it on the tendency of principles, or on the lives of men, that Dr. Prieſtley reaſoned, when he compared the *virtue* of trinitarians with that of unitarians, allowing that though the latter had more of an apparent conformity to the world than the former, yet upon the whole they approached nearer to the proper temper of chriſtianity than they?* Did he confine himſelf to the tendency of principles, in what he has related of Mr. Badcock?† Does he not refer to the *practices* of antinomians in proof of the immoral tendency of calviniſm, repreſenting them as the legitimate offspring of our principles?‡

And though Mr. Belſham now affects to be diſguſted with this mode of reaſoning, yet there was a time when he ſeemed to think it would be of ſervice to him, and when he figured away in the uſe of it. Did he not affirm, that "they who are ſincerely pious, and diffuſively benevolent with our principles, could "not have failed to have been much *better*, "and much *happier*, had they adopted a mil-

* *Dis. on Var. Sub.* p. 100. † *Fam. Lett.* Lett. xxii.
‡ See the quotation, p. 108 of the foregoing Letters.

" der, a more rational, a more truly evangeli-
" cal creed?" And what is this but affirming, that thoſe of his ſentiments are *better* and *happier* in general than others?

Yet this gentleman affects to deſpiſe the foregoing Letters, for that the ſum of them is, " We calviniſts being much better chriſtians " than you ſocinians, our doctrines muſt of " courſe be true."* Strange, that a writer ſhould ſo far forget himſelf, as to reproach the performance of another for that which is the characteriſtic of his own!

Nor is this all—In the ſmall compaſs of the ſame diſcourſe, he expreſſes a hope that ſocinian converts would " at length feel the be-
" nign influence of their principles, and *demon-
" ſtrate the excellence of their faith, by the ſu-
" perior dignity and worth of their character.*" If the excellence of principles, (and of courſe their truth, for nothing can be excellent which is not true) be not demonſtrable by the character of thoſe who embrace them, How is ſuperior dignity and worth of character to demonſtrate it?

Such was once the "ſelf-commending" language of Mr. Belſham: but whether his converts have diſappointed his hope, or whether

* *Review of Mr. Wilberforce*, p. 274.

the ground be too "holy" for him, ſo it is, that he is now entirely of a different mind; and what is worſe, would fain perſuade his readers that it is ground on which he and his brethren have never "treſpaſſed."

This is the man, who after throwing down the gauntlet, declines the conteſt; and after his partiſans have laboured to the utmoſt to maintain their cauſe, talks of what they *could ſay, and do*, were they not withheld by motives of generoſity!

One would imagine from Mr. Belſham's manner of writing, that I had dealt largely in *tales* of private characters. The truth is, what tales have been told are of their own telling. I freely acknowledged that 'I was not ſufficiently acquainted with the bulk of ſocinians, to judge of their moral character.'* Every thing was reſted on their own conceſſions; and this it is which is the galling circumſtance to Mr. Belſham and his party. They may now inſinuate what great things they *could* bring forward to our diſadvantage, were they not reſtrained by motives of modeſty and generoſity: but they can do nothing. They might indeed collect tales of individuals, and point out many faults which attach to the general body: but they

* See pp. 111, 112 of the Letters.

cannot prove it to be equally immoral with the general body of ſocinians. Before this can be conſiſtently attempted, they muſt retract their conceſſions; and this will not avail them, for it muſt be manifeſt to all men that it was only to anſwer an end.

The reader is now left to judge for himſelf, whether the principle of reaſoning adopted in the foregoing Letters, be juſtly liable to the objections which have been raiſed againſt it; whether our opponents did not firſt apply it againſt us; and whether any other reaſon can be given for their preſent averſion to it, than that they feel it to be unfavourable to their cauſe.

A. F.

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